

THE INDYPENDENT

Chinatown Suffers Quietly

BY CHRIS FLEISHER

"I've been in business 40 years and I've never seen anything like this," says Harry Chenn, proprietor of Shoes By Lorian on Canal Street, Chinatown's main drag. Since Sept. 11, Chenn has had to lay off half of his employees and cut prices by 40-50 percent in order to remain in business.

"Our sales are down 70 percent [since Sept. 11]," agrees Jay, manager of 195 Dragon Jewelry, also in Chinatown.

At first glance, nearly nine months after the terrorist attacks that decimated lower Manhattan, it might seem that Chinatown is back to its usual bustle. On sun-drenched Saturdays, tourists sipping peal tea throng the streets and peruse the shops. Harry Chenn sees a different story.

"Mostly the streets are very quiet," says Chenn. "The restaurants are crying."

Chinatown is perhaps the most severely struck of the areas directly affected by the Sept. 11 attacks. Of 33,658 workers in Chinatown, 24,500 were temporarily dislocated in the two weeks following the attacks and 23 percent were laid off within three months. Total wage losses are estimated at \$114 million.

Yet despite the severity of the economic dislocation in Chinatown, workers and businesses have found few avenues of assistance. Many small businesses did not qualify for governmental aid because their accounting documentation did not meet the threshold set for qualification for funds.

"[Government agencies] wanted documentation two and three years back," says Robert Webber, spokesman for Asian Americans for Equality. "Most [Chinatown businesses] run a cash business with small profit margins."

Though the Labor Department gave Chinatown \$1 million in December, Steven Yip, Director of Operations at the Chinese American Planning Council, says he has seen little help from the government since then.

"You get a lot of hot air," he says. "From my knowledge, there's not much [financial assistance], if any."

A majority of businesses are also ineligible for aid from private relief agencies, many of which established Canal Street as

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BREAKING THE SILENCE

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES FACE ONGOING PERSECUTION AFTER 9/11

BY GABRIEL WOODHOUSE

On May 9, Jamal Saleem, a Middle Eastern immigrant arrested by the INS for the non-criminal violation of overstaying his visa, began a hunger strike from his cell in Passaic County Jail, N.J. Saleem is protesting the arbitrary arrest and detention of thousands of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim immigrants since Sept. 11 who are being held without due process, access to legal counsel or proper medical care.

As the INS, FBI and even some local law enforcement agencies continue to target these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) claims that the current wave of anti-immigrant activity is "one of the most serious civil liberties crises our nation has ever seen."

Six months after the U.S. government stopped providing public information about the number or status of these immigrants, families of thousands of detainees still await answers about their loved ones. Community groups, including Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) and the Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants, warn that the situation will only worsen as the detentions continue and the government's initiatives escalate.

Overall, some 60,000 American Muslims and others of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent have been negatively impacted by U.S. government policies since Sept. 11, according to the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). The group's "Stereotypes and Civil Liberties" study detailed reports of FBI searches and "interviews," INS detentions, frozen bank accounts and property seizures.

The ACLU, Human Rights Watch and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee have also reported thousands



of recent bias incidents nationwide including murders, violent hate crimes, vandalism of religious institutions, employment discrimination and school harassment.

Despite these injustices and the climate of intimidation they have generated, the communities most directly affected refuse to be silenced.

TESTIMONIES OF INJUSTICE

Ghazi Khankan, executive director of the New York chapter of CAIR, characterizes the climate in America as "the age of McCarthyism reborn" for many Muslims and immigrants. Khankan explains that in many ways, the entire American Muslim community of over seven million people have become potential criminal suspects and encounter law enforcement procedures that are "like Third World policies with no respect for due process or basic human rights."

Khankan points to recent FBI raids and searches of Muslim and immigrant communities in Washington, D.C., Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis and the greater New York metropolitan area as examples of actions that "threaten the constitutional rights of law-abiding members of Muslim and immigrant communities and [of] all Americans."

Shortly after President Bush signed the USA Patriot Act,

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CHECK OUT THIS STORY.

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WHAT IS THE IMC?

With autonomous chapters in 100 cities throughout the world, the two-year-old Independent Media Center has become an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC's mission is to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to illuminate and analyze issues impacting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate.

Unlike corporate media, we espouse open dialogue, and the importance of placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, and away from the drive of profit.

The *Independent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions and contributions. All reporting is done by NYC IMC volunteers unless otherwise noted.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write for the *Independent*, film events and rallies, self-publish articles to the web, take photos, or just help us run the office. As an organization relying entirely on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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Here's a sampling of recent posts and comments to the NYC and global newswires. Each Independent Media Center website features open publishing software that allows readers to post articles, stories, photographs, audio clips and video footage to our newswire. Viewers can also log comments that appear below articles allowing for open debate. To read more or to post your own article, visit www.nyc.indymedia.org or www.indymedia.org.

Someone Lied to the People of NYC

By Felixxer

Myself and hundreds of thousands of citizens are not conspiracy nuts but Americans who are not satisfied with the explanations (or lack of) concerning 9-11 and that it has taken eight months and an accidental finding of FBI notes for action to be taken is unacceptable.

There is a terrible truth that is waiting to be uncovered and like it or not it must be revealed to all Americans if this country is to live with freedom and without fear of what its elected representatives and bureaus may be hiding.

This cannot wait for a congressional examination thirty years after the fact as in the case of the Kennedy assassination that a conspiracy was in place. To believe that the American people cannot accept the truth is denigrating to all citizens who have shown their true spirit of giving and acceptance both before and after 9-11. That an administration may collapse will not result in this country falling apart. It did not collapse after Nixon resigned and will not if further examination of 9-11 shows more than an intelligence failure.

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24715

Not In Our Name: June 6 Protests in NYC, Los Angeles, San Francisco

By Anon

We are people of conscience who cannot stand silent as our government wages war without limits of time and space. We cannot stand silent as immigrants are rounded up and detained. We cannot stand silent in the face of new police state restrictions threatening the very right to dissent.

We refuse to allow President Bush to speak for all the American people. We will not give up our right to question. We will not hand over our consciences in return for a hollow promise of safety. Together as one, we say Not in Our Name. We encourage everyone to take up the Not in Our Name project and to help launch it on June 6. On that day, thousands of people in cities across the country will take a common Pledge of Resistance, declaring their determination to resist now in diverse ways and to stop this course.

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24365

Madrid: Big Demos Opposing the Trans- Atlantic Meeting

By IMC Athens

In Madrid, Spain, a meeting of the leaders of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean took place during May 17-19. At the same [time], tens of organisations under the coalition "Transatlantic Social Forum" organised their own "People's meeting", which included talks

and discussions concerning the social impacts of the politics of those in power, as well as the future of the up-and-coming movement of resistance. Street acts also took place. On Sunday, May 19, more than 100,000 people (according to the Forum) participated in the biggest event of those days. [See photo]

www.madrid.indymedia.org



Anarchists To Be Targeted as "Terrorists" Alongside Al Qaeda

By IMC

Europol has produced a Situation and Trends report on terrorist activity in the European Union. As might be expected the report covers ETA in Spain, the Real IRA in Northern Ireland, the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica and "Islamic extremist terrorism" (including Al Qaeda).

A new category is that of "anarchist terrorism". In February 2001 a Europol seminar on counter-terrorism held in Madrid agreed on a proposal by Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy to set up a joint investigation team on "anarchist terrorism."

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24232

FROM THE NEWSWIRE

Transport Workers Rally!

By m!rek

SAVE the FARE! This is what TRANSPORT WORKERS LOCAL UNION - 100 are rallying about at this minute! Right in front of Pataki's office building, near 42nd Street and 3rd Ave. This is the message they are sending: A message from your Bus and Subway Workers! The MTA is threatening fare hikes and service cuts next year! That's a disguised tax hike that falls most heavily on New York's working people. The riders (that's you) and the drivers, operators, and mechanics (that's us) must join together to demand:

NO FARE INCREASES! KEEP THE TOKEN BOOTHS OPEN! A VOICE AND A VOTE FOR RIDERS AND WORKERS ON THE MTA BOARD!

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24243

Activists Occupy Senator's Office: Demanding A Vote Against Fast Track

By S'ra DeSantis

This Tuesday, six other activists and I occupied Senator James Jeffords' office in Burlington, VT, demanding he vote against Trade Promotion Authority (TPA). We locked together with PVC lock-boxes and refused to leave until Jeffords complied with our demands or we were physically removed. After entering the office a banner was hung across the street that read: "Jeffords: Stop the FTAA, Derail Fast Track, No New NAFTAs."

In Vermont, alone, over 600 people lost their jobs during the first three years of NAFTA. The Northeast Dairy Compact or any similar bill that helps Vermont dairy farmers with guaranteed prices, could be considered a barrier to trade under NAFTA or the proposed FTAA.

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24701

The Manhattan Institute: Big Brother's Spin Doctors

By SCP-New York

On 2 May 2002, the *New York Post* published a slick defense of the use of surveillance cameras in public places written by William D. Eggers and Eve Tushnet of the Manhattan Institute, a high-profile right-wing think-tank.

Entitled "Big Brother's Eyes" and printed on the *Post's* opinion page, this defense appeared on the very day that the tabloid newspaper thanked the Institute for giving it an award. Clearly the intention was to give Eggers and Tushnet's piece as much attention as possible.

Ironically, unlike the cameras they are defending, Eggers and Tushnet have a very limited field of vision. Though the vast majority of public surveillance cameras are installed and operated by private companies, Eggers and Tushnet's piece focuses exclusively on what they call "government cameras."

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24320

Why Palestinian Elections Are Needed Now

By Kevin S [who was just in Palestine]

Virtually every Palestinian is having conversations now about the need for political reform in the PA...including and especially Arafat and others in the PA.

This shake up is badly needed, and necessary if the PA is going to continue to survive with any real level of popular support. This is just a simple fact that you can hear from any street corner in Palestine. Elections are not the only possibility for moving these reforms forward, and many people say they are not the best way right now...and this is especially the position of some in the PA — as can be expected.

But the best reason that a call for elections needs to be made soon is because it is one of the best Intifada tactics that could be used right now to end or at least alleviate the occupation. A call for elections, with a date 6, 9, or 12 months away would put the international involvement in Palestine under entirely new conditions.

www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24032

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LOCAL

BUDGET BATTLE

Bloomy Bludgeons Public Service Budget

BY ANNE VENESKY AND ARMAND SAMOS

“Everybody has to share the pain in bad times,” has been Mayor Bloomberg’s banal credo as he has struggled to defend his bare bones proposals for the city’s \$41.4 billion budget for 2003. Everybody, it seems, means people who depend on the city’s public services.

The \$1.8 billion across-the-board cuts are part of a larger plan to close the city’s \$5 billion deficit. Even after state and federal funding commitments, the city still faces a \$750 million shortage, rendering Bloomberg’s proposed \$500 million contingency cuts insufficient to balance the budget, according to the Independent Budget Office (IBO).

The mayor’s one-dimensional strategy of slicing and dicing the city’s vital public services ignores the real cause of budget shortfalls, according to watchdog group, City Project. The crisis “is much more a revenue than a spending problem...and...requires new revenue sources — not massive service cuts,” the group reports.

Bloomberg could avoid large cuts to services by seeking revenues from the city’s wealthiest residents, recipients of large tax cuts during the Giuliani years.

Tax increases targeting the wealthy are preferable to cutting public programs, City Project says. Citing the views of former Clinton White House economist Peter Orszag and former World Bank Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz, it argues, “increased taxes for the wealthy...result in their reduced savings, rather than reduced consumption, while public service cuts...directly reduce consumption.”

In short, the fiscal crisis does not have to be the short-sighted cutback juggling act it has become.

As Bloomberg’s proposals stand, housing and education services are slated to take the worst hit. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development faces a 26 percent reduction in funding, including a four-year \$380 million reduction in its capital budget, short changing its Capital Preservation Loan Programs, which fund building repairs and code enforcement, and its Rehabilitation Loan Programs, which offer loans for buildings in disrepair.

With an estimated shortage of 200,000 affordable housing units, Irene Baldwin of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development says, Bloomberg’s proposed reductions in preservation programs will intensify New York’s housing crisis. Moreover, they aren’t cost effective and neglect communities most in need of affordable housing.

“It’ll cost \$100,000 to purchase a unit you can preserve for \$10,000. So it’s cheaper to keep what you have rather than build,” says Baldwin, acknowledging that purchasing buildings has served middle-income rather than low-income communities.

City Project, on the other hand, offers recommendations that address city revenue shortages, not an imagined largesse. These alternatives to spending cuts would generate the \$1.8 billion Bloomberg plans to cut.

Adding two new top rates of 4.15 and 4.65 percent to the city’s nominally progressive personal income tax rates, currently at 2.73 for the poorest and 3.65 percent for the

richest, would yield a relatively painless \$515-660 million, the group claims.

The business-friendly mayor and CEO, however, has not found this idea palatable enough to warrant his consideration.

Nor has he heeded City Project’s suggestion to administer a 5 percent increase in property taxes — the city’s largest source of revenue (40 percent). City property taxes have been frozen for 10 years, impairing the city’s ability to raise revenues, City Project contends. The tax increase could generate \$500 million with only a moderate impact on most residential owners and renters.

The mayor would rather round out his one-two punch to public services with a \$358 million reduction in education funding. At stake are 1,000 teachers, 600 teacher aides, \$61 million in after-school programs and \$24 million in student support services.

Many city students, like Environmental Studies High School student Jennifer Lipschitz, fear a more than moderate impact on their education. Lipschitz, who participated in a recent city-wide student walk-out against the proposed cuts, said, “We are losing new electives, half of our old electives and probably our sports teams.”

Meanwhile, City Project argues, restoration of the commuter tax — repealed in 1999 after funding services for 20 years — could raise \$500 million for Lipschitz and her peers.

City agencies, moreover, can easily build a longer-term, sustainable revenue base by helping many poor and working class New Yorkers obtain benefits made available by federal economic stimulus programs.

The Community Food Resource Center estimates that city agencies, in collaboration with non-profit community organizations could help 500,000 eligible New Yorkers sign up for \$565 million in food stamps annually. Furthermore, a similar outreach program could help 230,000 eligible New York working families obtain earned income tax credits worth up to \$4,000 per family.

Finally, as City Project reports, the city has been “unconscionably slow to spend the \$135 million a year that comes from the federal Workforce Investment Act for employment and training efforts for people losing welfare benefits, the unemployed and the underemployed.”

In light of these alternatives, the mayor’s pending squeeze on the city’s service infrastructure appears ill-informed at the very least — with \$26 million in cuts to the Department for the Aging to eliminate weekend meals for homebound seniors; a \$97 million reduction in children’s services to abolish 10,000 day care slots for poor families; and \$55 million to be funneled out of public health services and community clinics.

Only time will tell how well already-hardened New Yorkers will withstand Bloomberg’s blunt fiscal maneuvers. While viable solutions to the budget crisis go unnoticed by the mayor, his bland consolation that, “In these tough financial times, we must learn to do more with less,” seems to lack justification.



RENT STABILIZED TENANTS DEMAND RENT ROLLBACK

Rent stabilized tenants are demanding a rent rollback this year, in light of the news that operating costs for landlords fell 1.6 percent from last year. This was the first time in more than 30 years that the “price index study,” often used by the board to determine rent increases, was negative. In addition, Rent Guidelines Board data shows that profits from stabilized apartments are once again higher than they were last year and up nearly 40 percent in the past four years (the highest profits in the city’s history). The board, however, has never lowered rents. In fact, a study done by the Public Advocate’s office in 1997 found that the RGB had raised rents in excess of its own price formula for 18 out of 22 years studied.

Over 26,000 New Yorkers were evicted last year, most because they could not afford their rent, and higher numbers are expected this year. The Coalition for the Homeless reports that the homeless population has exploded since Sept. 11: over 33,000 New Yorkers (including 14,000 children) are sleeping in the city shelter system nightly, more than ever before in New York history.

For more information on the campaign for a rent rollback in 2002, contact the Met Council on Housing: 212.979.6236 ext. 6 or active@metcouncil.net.

CORPORATIONS GET RICH OFF DEAD EMPLOYEES

Walt Disney, AT&T, Nestle USA and Proctor & Gamble are among a growing number of businesses that are secretly taking out life insurance policies on employees in order to increase corporate profits, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Known in some cases as “Dead Peasants” insurance, firms reap payoffs up to \$500,000 when a young employee dies. Under federal law none of the money has to be shared with surviving family members.

The *Journal* highlighted the case of Margaret Reynolds, an Ohio woman who suffered from Lou Gehrig’s disease. Shortly before she died in 1998, her son begged her employer, CH Holdings, to buy a specialized \$5,000 wheelchair to allow her to attend church. The company refused. But when Reynolds, an administrative assistant who made \$21,000 a year, died, CH Holdings cashed in on an \$180,000 life insurance policy. Her family received nothing.

TRANS PEOPLE GET SAME RIGHTS EVERYONE ELSE ALREADY HAD

In April, New York City became the nation’s 33rd city to extend to transgendered people protections against discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

“The fact that the bill passed by such an overwhelming margin and that the mayor pushed for its passage shows that transgender-inclusive thinking is the wave of the future,” said Lorri L. Jean, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

DRUM MARCHES TO ITS OWN BEAT

BY MAIA RAMNATH

Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) sprang to life in 1999 when a group of young, working class South Asians started street tabling in Jackson Heights, Queens, the bustling heart of the South Asian immigrant community.

Talking with community members to identify needs and concerns, activists were then able to offer resources and information in four languages. Projects initiated included training and empowerment for youth organizers; education on immigrant, tenant and worker rights; and countering police brutality toward communities of color.

This last project led directly toward the focus on INS detention. When the post-Sept. 11 crackdown on immigrants began, DRUM was the only group in the Northeast working with INS detainees and their families.

"Most people don't realize that since 1996, the fastest growing segment of the prison population has been immigration-related," says Shubh Mathur, a Hindi- and Urdu-speaking volunteer in DRUM's prison visitation project. "Even before 9/11 there were 20,000 'aliens' in detention. This has just given it a new impetus. They're always looking for any excuse to deport people, and this is a very convenient one." Twenty percent of INS detainees in the New York City area prior to Sept. 11 were South Asian. Since then, the Pakistani community has been particularly hard-hit.

Although the Sept. 11 fallout has made organizing more difficult, according to DRUM's director Monami Maulik, it also provided a powerful catalyst, catapulting DRUM's work into national attention.

In addition to visitations, DRUM also facilitates monthly family meetings and legal support for prisoners, as well as pressuring officials and holding demonstrations — they will mark their 20th week of protests at Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center on Saturday, June 8. Three full-time staffers (one of whom is a former detainee) and two part-time youth organizers work with 30-40 volunteers, the bulk of whom do prison visitations.

A newly forming community board of family members of detainees and undocumented workers is the source of leadership and political decision-making. The group's demographics provide a "snapshot of how South Asia looks in New York," says Maulik. The majority are Bangladeshis, Pakistanis or Indian Muslims.

DRUM also seeks to maintain a majority working

class and majority female leadership. With its ability to link issues and concerns affecting different communities, DRUM excels at coalition building. Shortly after Sept. 11, it teamed up with a number of local groups to form the Arab and South Asian Community Network for mutual support and resource sharing. In working with the

Prison Moratorium Project on the Stop the Disappearances Campaign, it aims to connect the work being done around immigrant detentions with wider prison-industrial complex issues.

DRUM has also been active in the global justice movement against corporate capitalism, a campaign often criticized for its predominantly white-middle-class profile. In gathering South Asian, young and working class people to get involved in these mobilizations around a different set of needs and issues, Maulik hopes to create "a new anti-globalization movement, one more accountable to people of color" and connected to day-to-day community work.

Tackling the explosive dynamics of both race and

class, DRUM is a rare model for social justice organizations, many of whom struggle with how to confront these problems together. DRUM draws clear distinctions between the 1965-era immigration wave of affluent professionals and the more recent influx of poor working people who lack their predecessors' ability to purchase instant status. Of the 10 progressive South Asian organizations in the area, none provided a comfortable environment for working class people, especially recent immigrants, says Maulik.

DRUM was created to address this gap, and to promote the leadership of poor people in creating social change. "It's not enough to simply talk about people of color groups," says Maulik. "This denies discrepancies of class and privilege; where people are coming from." With a "critical mass" of South Asians now getting involved in social justice and anti-war organizing, Maulik says that "the heart of the work in the coming years will be to build stronger links between the [non-immigrant] racial justice and immigrants' rights movements. They're going to try to divide people of color along citizenship lines, and we need to beware of that."

It's the repercussions of U.S. imperialism, she continues, which create the economic and social conditions under which immigrants come here from the third world — only to be arrested and excluded. "That's what the globalization movement has to be about: making these connections," says Maulik.

For more info, see www.drumnation.org



BRAD WILL

DRUMing up support for detainees

Subscribe to THE INDYPENDENT
see page 10

CHINATOWN, CONTINUED FROM COVER

the northern boundary of the area eligible for Sept. 11-related aid. Eighty percent of Chinatown's garment factories are located north of Canal. UNITE, a major garment workers union, reports that 40 garment factories in Chinatown were shut down in the three months after Sept 11.

But Harry Chenn guesses that many more have closed. "There's a couple hundred factories closed," he says. "Before, there were about 500 factories. I think now, you have about 150 factories. Even less than that."

A study released in April by the Asian American Federation of New York recommends that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation include Chinatown in its planning and development efforts.

The study calls for coordinated strategies to help unemployed workers obtain assistance and for comprehensive planning and investment for community economic development in Chinatown.

The report also recommends that more English as a Second Language training be made available to potential workers. The Chinatown Manpower Project reports that of 194 unemployed individuals applying for job training, 71 percent faced communication challenges.

Yip agrees with this finding. "After a while, we

need to shift into a long-term plan. At the core [of long-term development] is job training. At the core of job training is ESL."

However, Yip is also careful to point out that the language barrier is only one of many issues that need more attention.

"We need to look at the common person, particularly those persons that are undocumented," he says. Though some financial assistance is now being given to residents north of Canal Street, there is still no financial assistance available for undocumented workers in Chinatown.

Webber cites transportation as another key factor in economic recovery. Over 50 percent of Chinatown workers live in the outer boroughs and rely on public transit. But in the weeks following Sept. 11,

Chinatown was declared one of many "frozen zones" in which transportation was restricted. Operating on thin profit margins, any cash flow fluctuations can be dire for a small Chinatown business.

In the end, Chinatown merchants feel that determining the cause of the financial devastation is secondary to finding a solution.

When asked what he will do if he is forced to close, Jay does not see a choice. "We've been in business 29 years," he says. "We have to stay in business."



ARGENTINA AHORA: A Movement Beyond Politics

An exhibit featuring photos, words, posters & films documenting a nation's collapse and a people's creative response. The work of photographers from the Buenos Aires based art & media collective *Argentina Arde*, as well as independent photographers from New York and Seattle, with a screening of short films about the uprising by various video collectives from Argentina and the U.S.

PROCEEDS GO TO BENEFIT INDEPENDENT MEDIA MAKERS IN ARGENTINA

TUES, JUNE 4 @ WALKER STAGE - DOORS AT 6PM
OCOTE SOUL SOUND FEATURING MEMBERS OF ANTIBALAS
56 Walker Street, btw West Broadway and Church. Doors open at 6 p.m.

FRIDAY, JUNE 7 @ LA PENA DEL BRONX - DOORS AT 6PM
226 E. 144th St. Take the 2, 4, 5 to 149 St & Grand Concourse. La Pena is 1.5 blks from subway

FOR MORE INFO: WWW.POSTWORLDINDUSTRIES.ORG

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES RESIST OPPRESSION POST 9/11

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Attorney General Ashcroft directed the FBI to conduct interviews with a list of at least 5,000 men based solely on their age, date of entry to the nation and their country of origin. These directives have resulted in countless reports of intrusions by government officials in a nation-wide fury of racial profiling.

According to Subhash Kateel of DRUM, INS detainees, their families and communities sense that the Constitution is simply not applicable to their plight.

“Freedom of speech is something they hear about. But the reality is it just doesn’t exist in these directly affected communities,” explains Kateel.

Kateel also points to the raids on homes and businesses as an example of the government violating its own principles. “The Justice Department claims to be responding to reports of hate crimes, yet is actively perpetrating crimes of discrimination and racial profiling,” said Kateel.

New York attorney Afaf Dahir, who helped form the Legal Committee for the Release of Farouk Abdel-Muhti, says the Patriot Act “is being used as a political weapon, one that could potentially be used against over 20 million American immigrants.”

Dahir explains that Abdel-Muhti, who was arrested at his home on April 26, is being targeted as an outspoken Palestinian activist. After federal agents visited his home several weeks before his arrest, he publicized the events on WBAI. Today he remains jailed in a Middlesex County, New Jersey, detention center.

Dahir notes that the government’s domestic “anti-terrorism” actions in cases such as Abdel-Muhti’s are “tactics that are meant to harass individuals and communities, and ultimately to silence the voices of people so that the greater public does not know what is really going on.”

Like Khankan, Dahir frames the current government abuses as potential threats to all Americans in the future. “There is a great danger that before many people realize what is happening, the infringement of basic rights will affect people throughout mainstream American communities. That’s why I call it ‘The Blind Patriot Act,’” said Dahir. “Many citizens are just not aware of what this could eventually mean for all people in this country.”

THE EFFECT OF THE MEDIA

A common thread that links many voices from these targeted communities is the role of the mainstream media. Adam Carroll, a family assistance project coordinator for the Islamic Circle of North America, sees a connection between media coverage and lost constitutional rights.

“Media bias and its distortion of truth plays a big part in limiting free speech. It serves to create a kind of censorship of ideas,” explains Carroll. “What happens is that certain voices are not heard as truly ‘American’ voices. An entire ‘us versus them’ dichotomy is created and communities are in effect silenced because

they become ‘the other.’”

Maria, a Muslim woman born in Chile who preferred not to use her real name, explains that because of stereotyping in the mainstream press: “The American public is being deprived of the truth, and being led to believe that the Muslims are a people with no education or family values.”

Maria points out that there is minimal coverage of events that have negatively impacted Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim communities. “The media have covered only what is unavoidable, but they have no interest in revealing the real atrocities being committed against our communities,” she observes.

According to Wahba Ghaly, an Egyptian Christian who founded and directs Mentors, an HIV awareness outreach program for Arabic and Islamic communities in New York, the basic model of the American media is to demonize communities and individuals, “creating an enemy by turning facts around.”

Ghaly, like Carroll, identifies the crux of media distortion as the creation of false dichotomies. “It’s really all about media control,” Ghaly explains.

MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE

Yet, despite the rampant discrimination and injustice, there is a profound resiliency and sense of momentum that many see as an opportunity for effecting change. Osman Sahardeed, assistant director of the Somali community of Minnesota, has created a task force that is directly responding to a recent round of FBI activities against the Minneapolis Somali community.

Sahardeed is mobilizing the community and transforming that energy into a detailed plan of action, including a letter-writing campaign to U.S. district attorneys and senators. One such “open letter” that was also sent to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, captures this spirit of transformation: “Through these trying times Somalis remain optimistic that the general public will realize that Somalis are not a threat to the stability of the United States and that we are a community committed to becoming part of the American mainstream.”

“I truly believe that if the American public understood what was really going on,” she says, “they would not give their consent to the government to conduct these violations of human rights.” Dahir emphasizes that marginalized communities, as well as the larger American mainstream, must “shed the psychology of fear” and see that the time is “ripe for change.”

As Kateel explains, the current situation “creates one of the most important moments in terms of mobilization for our country. It is time for us to escalate our tactics and raise our voices and continue to pull all of the concerned communities and organizations together. We need to maintain hope for creative alternatives to the injustices that are so dominant right now.”



LINA PALLOTTA



LINA PALLOTTA



FRED ASKEW



FRED ASKEW

“CODE RED!”

Radical Sisters Shock Street Harassers

BY CATHY BUSSEWITZ

“Code Red!” yelled Erin, standing in front of the man who had just licked his lips suggestively at her. Seven other women ran to her side. “What’s going on here?” they asked. “Did you just harass her? We don’t have to take this!”

The women were part of a counter-harassment party organized by the Street Harassment Project in early May, in which teams of women spoke out to men who provoked them on the street. The second annual “‘Rights’ of Spring” event brought over 20 women to Bluestockings Bookstore on the Lower East Side to share their stories of street harassment, to brainstorm and to try out strategies for fighting back.

“We really see the whole day as a big experiment in feminist research,” said Allison, an organizer from SHP. “We want to be able to document how dangerous [harassment] is, and what works [to combat it], and to make this information available. We want to change the culture in such a way that no man would be comfortable harassing a woman.”

The Street Harassment Project began in 1999 and grew more active after the June 2000 Central Park incident in which 56 women were assaulted, stripped and fondled after the Puerto Rican Day Parade.

The Project’s weekly meetings have spurred the counter-harassment party, street theater outings and a graphics campaign. As part of the graphics campaign, the group makes and distributes cards that mimic sex ads,

reading “Wanna Get Laid?” on one side and “Then Stop Harassing Women!” on the other.

A variety of strategies were explored during this year’s counter-harassment party, ranging from the polite to the aggressive. Women returned the stares of leering men, laughed at unsolicited comments and pointed out to the perpetrator that his mother or sister would be ashamed of his behavior. Some also snapped photographs of the men, collected identification or stared at their bodies very closely.

Consciousness-raising is a particularly useful recourse, said Lisa, another SHP organizer. “The first thing is to get people to admit that this is happening, because for your own sanity, you block it out.” To that end, the women shared stories. Erin spoke of being threatened and followed by men while walking home one evening. She approached some police officers for help, telling them what the men were doing.

“We don’t blame them,” responded the officers, who then tried to coax her into the car. When she refused, the officers said they would follow her home. “To protect me?” she asked. “That depends on what you mean by protection!” they replied. Frightened, she ran home alone.

The SHP plans to organize more walks in the future, and is considering expanding the walk into different neighborhoods. “I think a lot of men got a shock today,” said Kate from SHP. “Being surrounded by a group of women — it was like a first time thing in their lives.”

For more information, visit www.streetharassmentproject.org

BUSH SEEKS ACADEMIC PROFILING IN UNIVERSITIES

At the direction of President Bush, officials from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy have met behind closed doors with representatives from other federal agencies throughout the past month to debate an “anti-terrorism” policy that would keep some foreign students from studying “sensitive” academic subjects. The Bush administration qualified “sensitive” subjects as those that could bear on the development of weapons of mass destruction, according to Agence France-Presse.

Universities say such a policy would threaten academic freedom and the core of the university mission.

“Open universities are a basic freedom...and we don’t want to give that up,” said Sarah Flanagan, vice president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in a recent *San Francisco Chronicle* report.

An international graduate student in engineering at UC Berkeley, who was afraid to be identified for fear of attracting government attention, called the racial profiling and stereotyping of foreign students an insult. “Basically, it is saying that if you are a student from the Middle East studying engineering, you will go back home and make a bomb,” the student said. “For me, this is a war on education and on immigrant and international students’ rights.”

PENTAGON WANTS \$600M INCREASE IN PROPAGANDA BUDGET

Charlotte Beers, a former Madison Avenue advertising CEO who now goes by the official title of U.S. Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy, has asked Congress for nearly \$600 million to launch a propaganda campaign targeted at “disaffected populations” in the Middle East and South Asia. Beers wants to increase polling in Muslim and other countries where negative images of the U.S. dominate popular opinion, as well as air pro-American TV, radio shows and films featuring American celebrities and sports stars.

Despite the fact that, according to Odwyerpr.com, the State Department is already using \$15 million from an Emergency Response Fund to fund “an aggressive campaign of message placement,” Beers also aims to install so-called “American Corners” and reinvigorate English language courses in overseas universities.

She views these propaganda techniques as “an effective way of exposing students to American values and preparing them for productive lives in a modern world.”

READERS’ REACTIONS FLOOD NEWSWIRE

Editors’ note: The following comments are excerpted from over 80 remarks that appeared on the NYC-IMC open newswire after the original feature article about the Street Harassment Project (see www.nyc.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=24385).

While they may not capture the nuance of the conversation, they attempt to capture its breadth. The online comments originally included a number of violent pornographic pictures. Though we wouldn’t reprint these pictures here, we think that knowing this fact adds an additional dimension to the discussion below.

Get Over It

By J~Sun

While I don’t feel true sexual harrasment is by any means justified, I feel this “fight smoke with fire” approach is a bit heavy handed & I am hard pressed to sympathize with what seem to be a group of “reactionary extremists.” Not that I’ve ever been what I consider “sexually harassed” — which is a term I feel is abused & all too often thrown around in a “play victim” society — however I have experienced similar situations & worse since my youth due to being obese.... Educate don’t retaliate.

This is Not Such a Horrible Thing...

By Desiree

I think that, in the least, this is a good idea to help promote girls standing up for themselves. While typically a girl reacting aggressively to a man on the street may not be a good idea, it is a good idea for girls who are bothered by this to react in some way. That is all these people are looking to promote. Personally, during the day I’d say it’s usually safe to give someone the finger. When it happens to a girl every day, it is hard for her not to “get used to it”. She should do something. But she should also not take it too seriously. The guys who are doing this don’t have much dignity. Treating them that way is sometimes enough to shut them up (temporarily, though).

Only in New York

By Indianaguy

I get surrounded by eight anybody, and there’s liable to be eight broken bodies lying in the street. Eight hostiles is a clear and present danger in any definition, and were I on a jury, I’d vote not guilty. It’s a dangerous game you’re playing.

And You Call Yourself a RADICAL?

By Lady Liberty

To all the phony radicals on the board: Being subjected to unwelcome gestures, comments and other forms of intrusive behaviors on a daily basis for most of your life is essentially a form of terrorism. It’s terrorism of the psyche and the spirit...For the phony radicals who feel this isn’t as important as war...you can’t separate and RANK the wrongs of the world. Those who talk like this cannot legitimately consider themselves radicals. Fuck the reformists!

I am in SHOCK

By Anonymous

Wow, what a great article about street harassment and women fighting back! Very inspiring! But it is so sad that there are such negative woman hating comments in response. What’s up with that?

I know that from being harassed, stalked and nearly attacked on the streets by men that this is a very serious oppression of women in our society. If you don’t think so, maybe the Taliban is an option for you.

Keep Arguing

By JPS

I’ve been following this debate for some time. At first I was extremely skeptical about the tactics of the SHP, now I’m not so sure...a very interesting debate though. Everyone, keep it up, at least one person is still paying attention.

Lincoln Vets Relive Spanish Civil War

BY DONALD PANETH

"At some distance down the road (perhaps fifteen minutes from Tortosa) we passed an olive grove where a group of correspondents from Barcelona were gathered, eating sandwiches...Hemingway said we ought not to go beyond the crossroads at Santa Barbara, as there was a possibility or probability that the Fascists were advancing on both roads."

— Vincent Sheean, *Not Peace But a Sword*

It was 1937 and Max Shufer was serving in a machine gun company of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion on the Teruel front. Shufer was 22 years old.

"I had graduated from City College in New York and attended M.I.T. for a year," Shufer, now 87, recalled. "I shipped from Montreal. I was afraid my father would catch me. He was very anti-communist, anti-Spain, anti-everything."

"We traveled from Paris to the Spanish border, and went across at night," he continued. "In Teruel, we dug trenches, set up machine guns. We covered the guys going up and down the slopes."

Some 2,800 American volunteers rallied to the cause of the Spanish republic in 1937, fighting the Fascist revolt led by General Francisco Franco. Nearly 750 died. Franco's army entered Madrid in April 1939; five months later, World War II erupted.

One hundred and five members of the Lincoln Battalion are still around; they are in their 80s and 90s.



SAM WALTERS

On April 28 at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, 18 of them and about 700 guests attended the battalion's 66th annual reunion. They stood at the front of the auditorium, and one by one in turn addressed the audience. They remembered their deeds and their dead.

"Jack Green died on a very quiet afternoon when a piece of shrapnel did its deadly work," one said. "The skies above seemed such a gentle blue."

"I never knew there were so many bullets in the world, and they were all around me."

"Rifles cannot stop a motorized column."

"We are history, we are legend." A line of old men raised and clenched their right fists, and sang the Internationale. Many in the audience stood and joined in. "Vival!" they cried. "Vival!"

Juan Gonzalez, *New York Daily News* columnist and author of *Harvest of Empire*, spoke. He brought the story up to date with a Latin American angle.

"Venezuela is an example of how the mass media dilutes the news and disinformation the American people," Gonzalez said. "*The New York Times* welcomed the coup against President Hugo Chavez as a step towards democracy. The Intervention Network broadcasts

every day portraying Chavez as a dictator to be replaced.

"The mass media don't report that 80 percent of the people of Venezuela live in poverty, do not share in its oil wealth," he emphasized. "The mass media are the most powerful institutions in the U.S. today, outside the military. They have replaced the political parties. The



Some 2,800 American volunteers fought against Fascism in Spain from 1937-1939. Nearly 750 died.

American people are deluged with disinformation; they need a search engine to navigate through it."

The San Francisco Mime Troupe presented a musical dramatization, *What They Stood For*, by Peter Glazer and Bruce Barthol. It included songs, text, projected photographs and headlines like REBELS WIN IN NORTH AND MARCH TOWARD MADRID. Photos of troops entraining, demonstrators carrying banners, "FREIHEIT." (Freedom).

Then there were announcements. Julia Newman had produced a new documentary, *Into the Fire: American Women in the Spanish Civil War*. The Lincoln Battalion's archives are to be found in the Tamiment Institute library at New York University.

The fall of the republic, World War II, the McCarthy era were great sorrows for the veterans of the battalion. But their reunion was an event of spirit and conviction — hopeful, defiant. "The war goes on," remarked a vet. "Just the front has changed."

"Keep your standards high. I used to be in pretty good shape and then my standards were higher."

"I'm 96, and still a radical. Salud!"

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS GIVE "F" TO REGENTS EXAMS

BY JOHN TARLETON

Lai Ara Reagans is a sophomore at Vanguard High School who wants to go to college and become an early childhood teacher. She recently finished a report on the expectations that women and men have for themselves in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Now, she is grappling with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. "Sometimes when I read it, it just feels like words," she says. "But, when we get into the classroom and analyze it, I can feel like I'm right in the story."

Opportunities for students like Reagans to learn through inquiry may soon disappear as New York State continues to follow the national trend toward "high-stakes" standardized testing by implementing Regents exams at Vanguard and 27 other alternative public schools in New York City that previously had been exempted. Ninth grade students will be required to take a battery of tests from June 18-24. To graduate, they must eventually pass all five Regents exams.

Standards-based testing has proliferated around the country in the past 10 years. Teachers and principals now commonly receive performance bonuses based on their students' test scores. In California, students as young as seven years old are taking 10 days straight of multiple-choice testing. American students now take as many as 600 million standardized tests per year, according to the New York-based Students Against Testing (SAT).

That number will increase as the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind" initiative takes effect. By the 2005-2006 school year, public school children in grades three through eight will be tested annually in math and English. Critics of the tests worry that schools are spending more and more time and scarce resources on teaching kids how to pass tests.

"It's the meat market approach to education. There's no opportunity for personal relationships, for creativity or for innovation," said Bill Wetzel of SAT. "We're basically raising a generation of young people who know how to fill in other people's blanks."

Located at 67th Street and First Avenue, Vanguard High is a small high school of 440 mostly African-American and Latino students. It was founded 10 years ago as an experiment in innovative learning. Chemistry students investigate air pollution. Geometry students develop three-dimensional models of neighborhoods and calculate volume and surface weight. In English, students are writing literary analysis papers about John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

"I think it's the best way to learn because it stays with you," says Lindell Palmer, a senior in Mark Dunetz's second period English class. "You can spend a whole semester preparing for a test and when it's over, that's it. This way you put some of yourself into the work. It's more personal. You see products of your work showing in your papers, visuals and presentations."

Dunetz, 26, previously taught at two large conventional high schools in the City before arriving at Vanguard. He despairs of the wide-ranging Regents exams and the test-prep curricula that accompany it.

"No one's really interested in improvement," says Dunetz. "The politicians just want to build political capital. They are cynically proposing ridiculous ideas to a concerned public. Anyone in the public schools knows they are absurd."

Supporters of the alternative schools have held rallies in Albany and organized sporadic boycotts of eighth grade exams over the past two years. Ninety-one percent of graduates from the 28 alternative schools attend college compared to 63 percent of graduates from the remaining city schools, according to the New York



NYC's alternative schools may have to revert to a more traditional form of education.

Performance Standards Consortium.

Tests are created, printed, distributed and scored by private, quickly profiting corporations such as McGraw Hill, ETS and The College Board. In a special report, stateline.org revealed that in 2001 over \$400 million was spent by state education departments alone on testing.

Testing opponents are also pursuing a lawsuit against State Education Commissioner Richard P. Mills that seeks to reverse his decision forcing the alternative schools to give the Regents exams. They note that private schools (where several members of the Board of Regents have sent their children) have rejected the Regents exams as a waste of time. They argue for a portfolio system where a student is judged by her or his work over a period of time. At Vanguard, students have to complete nine portfolio projects (including an in-depth autobiography) and defend them before panels composed of teachers and fellow students before they can graduate.

"It's time-consuming," Dunetz notes. "But, it's a lot more personal a process than administering a test written by someone in Albany."

For more on standardized testing, see nomoretests.com and regentsprep.org.

GLOBAL

BANKING ON POVERTY IADB + TOURISM = MISERY IN BRAZIL

BY DYAN NEARY

Fortaleza, BRAZIL — Nighttime on the Beira Mar is a beautiful thing for a tourist. The pristine tranquility of a beach under the stars becomes a lively outdoor marketplace, chock-full of necessary souvenirs — sandals, hammocks, beads, statuettes, pens, “I heart Fortaleza” t-shirts and the quintessential sand in a bottle knick-knacks at cut-rate prices. Here the tourist can embark upon the “real” Brazilian experience without the pesky reality of poverty-ridden Brazilians to plague them.

Several kilometers away, invisible to the tourist eye, a group of small children matter-of-factly explain their poverty. “Our president is coming here today to the house of our state government, which is over the sand,” explains Felipe, 14, as he shyly crosses his arms across his tiny protruding ribs.

If Felipe could ask President Cardoso for one thing in the whole world, he said, he would ask for food. “Only food,” Felipe repeats. “We have everything else. We even have computers in our school — but my family never has enough food.”

Computers? Indeed. There are six computers available at the only school in their neighborhood, which serves 600 children. What the schools lack, however, are paper and books for those children, many of whom remain illiterate.

Within months, Felipe will be left homeless as tourism projects displace entire communities living along the beaches of northeast Brazil. These initiatives are put forth in the name of “development” and the “eradication of poverty” by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), which claims a genuine commitment to economic and social development for Latin America.

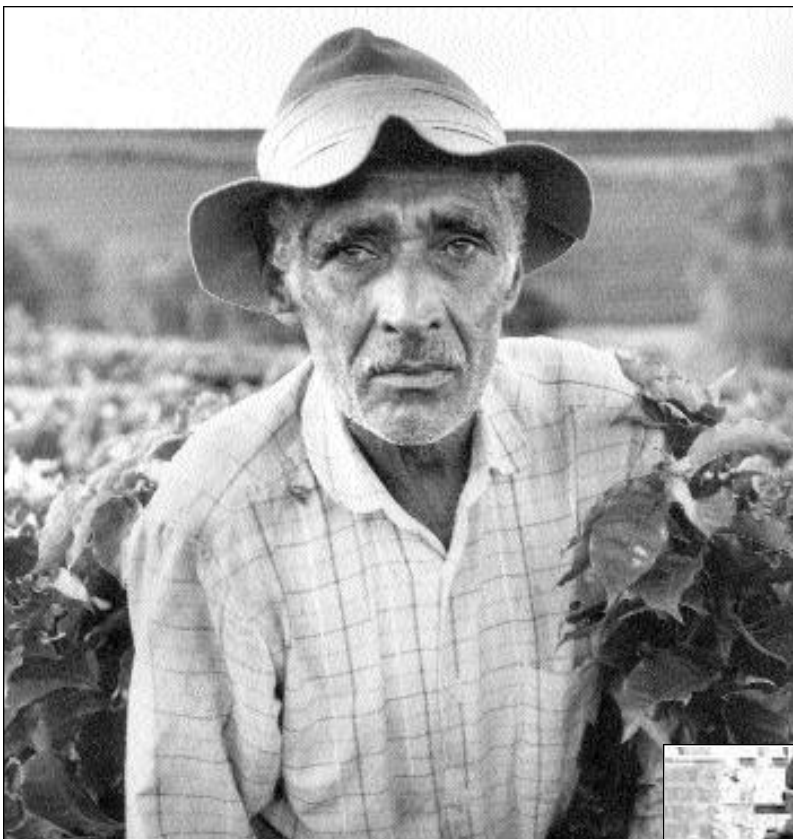
FINANCIERS OF HUNGER

The IADB may not be as well known as the World Bank, but its policies are disturbingly similar. It has operated throughout Latin America and the Caribbean since its inception in 1959, and a look at its track record reveals that the organization has only driven the continent further into a spiral of unending debt.

The Bank supported the disastrous privatization of

water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, that brought hundreds of thousands to the streets in protest of their skyrocketing water bills. It has financed scores of dam projects throughout Brazil that have not only displaced more than one million people, according to the International Rivers Network, but have also proven detrimental to the environment, spawning oppositional grassroots organizations like the Movement of the Affected by Dams.

Revitalizing and “remodeling” downtown areas of cities like Sao Paulo with shiny shopping malls and businesses, the IADB has pushed urban sprawl to its limits, simultaneously pushing the poor out of their low-cost homes. In 1999, the organization granted the government of Brazil an \$11-mil-



Victims of progress: Above, a Brazilian coffee farmer; Right, Felipe (left foreground) and friends from a *favela das areias* (“sand ghetto”).

lion loan to promote “sustainable economic activities” — or “ecotourism” — in the Amazon basin and argued for further deforestation in the region.

In February 2002, the IADB agreed to finance the controversial Transredes project, which initially brought Enron and Shell together for the construction of the new Yacuiaba pipeline (connecting the main Bolivia-Brazil pipeline to Argentina) and dragged those economies into the Enron meltdown.

It is all part of their quick-fix approach to solving major problems in developing countries, such as giving huge loans with equally huge interest rates and promoting tourism as part of its agenda for “sustainable development” in Fortaleza.

This is no surprise, as the IADB states quite clearly its objective to “open the doors to neo-liberalism” — proselytize, capitalize, decentralize, privatize, marketize — and look for the quickest ways to do it. It is here in Fortaleza, capital of Ceara that the IADB held its 43rd annual meeting this past March to discuss the latest initiatives to combat the many problems facing Latin

America, with a particular focus on Brazil.

Here, too, is where trade unions, grassroots organizations, leftist parties, students, socialists, anarchists and landless workers rose up in the streets at the sight of them, quick to point out one contradiction after another. Walls throughout the city were covered with accusations directed at the “financiers of hunger.”

“The tourist resort model they are trying to implement in the northwest of Brazil is very similar to the Caribbean model,” explains Fabiano Goncalvez, an activist and student at the University of Sao Paulo, who traveled three days by bus to join the recent protests. “The government wants this easy money from tourism, so they do not care about anything but making those enclosed in the resort happy, regardless of how it is affecting the people here.”

PHASING OUT THE POOR FOR TOURISTS

“Costa Oeste” is the name given to the most recent IADB contradiction. For the people of Pirambu — the only remaining *favela*, or slum, in the northeast of Brazil where poor people still live close to the beach — that name spells eviction for 3,000 families, as grand hotel complexes are built in place of homes they built with their own hands, and the price of land skyrockets. The displaced will most likely be forced into the uninhabited region where the Negro River empties into the Atlantic, a crucial part of the local ecosystem where many rare species reproduce.

The tourism industry also encourages markets for drug dealing and prostitution. “Child prostitution is enormous here, even 10- and 11-year old girls,” says Goncalvez. “There is a lot of sexual tourism and a kind of propaganda that says ‘Go to the third world and you can do whatever you want. The people need the money so much they will do anything, really anything for money.’”

For the IADB, this is sustainable development. They are financing Costa Oeste with \$600,000 and will use an additional \$100,000 to construct buildings in which only wealthy foreign tourists will sleep. Worse still, they call this “housing development,” despite the fact that it increases the number of the city’s homeless.

One of the most deleterious IADB projects is the Condado Ecologico do Camocim, which will convert Tatajuba — a region 280 miles from Fortaleza that contains dunes, lakes and bays — into what the Forum in Defense of the Costeira Zone (FDZC) in Brazil calls a “hegemonic vision of tourism.”

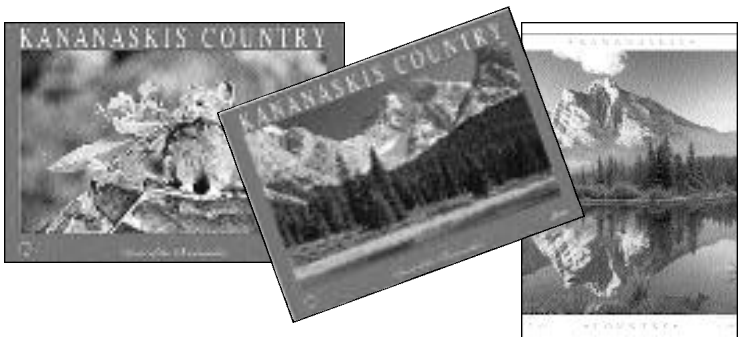
Since the 1970s, Tatajuba has survived on fishing, agriculture and animal husbandry. Over 700 residents will be displaced because a company called Vitoria Regia Empreendimentos Imobiliarios Ltda. claims to have documents granting them ownership of the land, though 60 percent of that land has permanent preservation status under Brazilian legislation.

A second phase of the project calls for the construction of new infrastructure, including roads, highways



DYAN N NEARY

WORLD LEADERS FLEE INTO THE WOODS; G8 PROTESTERS FOLLOW



BY IMC STAFF

On June 26 and 27, heads of state from eight of the most powerful nations, known as the G8, will meet in Kananaskis, Alberta, high in the Canadian Rockies. G8 summit organizers selected the resort's isolated locale in hopes of avoiding mass protests.

But protesters from the global resistance movement plan to counter with demonstrations on three fronts: the capital city Ottawa, Calgary and even around Kananaskis.

In a call to action, protest organizers link the G8 to the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

"[They] are all tools of the same corporate globalization project aimed at eliminating trade barriers to help multinational corporations gain higher profit margins through new markets and bases of operation."

Not surprisingly, most of the G8 member nations — Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States — have benefited greatly from the world's new economic order.

Anti-G8 organizers in Alberta have spent months planning "a community of resistance" called Solidarity Village to serve as both a protest headquarters and a social and economic experiment. "Solidarity Village will be a microcosm of the possible — a place where we can

strategize, tell stories, share regional issues; build long-term coalitions; demonstrate living alternatives to capitalism and teach each other new ways to manifest dissent," reads a description from the Village's website (<http://www.solidarityvillage.cjb.net>).

In Ottawa, groups including Montreal's Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC), Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights and the Anti-Capitalist Community Action Ottawa are organizing two days of action called "Take the Capital!"

"While mobilizing for Ottawa, we're organizing in our backyards. We see a direct link between homelessness and poverty in our communities and G8 [policies]. In Alberta, the G8 will discuss NEPAD (the New Economic Partnership for African Development), a structural development program that has been developed with no consultation with the African people," says Stefan Christoff of CLAC. "They [G8 nations] see that Africa's resources haven't been exploited enough. They want to open African labor to the global market."

Organizers say that G8 leaders and finance ministers meet under the pretense of serving the world economy and population but actually promote the relentless transfer of power and wealth to economic and political elites. In specific terms, the G8 favors privatization, deregulation (i.e. reducing or eliminating environmental, health, and labor standards) and capital mobility (by removing

currency and investment controls). Activists maintain that these reforms are destructive and inhumane as people lose economic and political control over their lives and their environments.

As with past large-scale convergences, the Canadian government has begun using scare tactics in an attempt to discourage protests around the G8. Canada plans to dispatch 5,000 military and police personnel to "defend" the summit. The premier of Alberta has warned that demonstrators may be shot if they participate in direct actions.

It wouldn't be a first for a G8 meeting. Last year in Genoa, Italian police shot dead young activist Carlo Giuliani during the anti-G8 demonstrations that attracted over hundreds of thousands of protesters. In addition, the Italian government conducted violent raids on an activist convergence center and the Indymedia headquarters that resulted in the hospitalization of dozens of activists.

Despite violent precedent and governmental deterrence, Canadian organizers expect thousands of demonstrators to fill the streets and woods from Alberta to Ottawa in protest of G8 policies.

For more info on the planned protests visit
www.g8.activist.ca (Alberta) and
www.takethecapital.net (Ottawa).

Brazil. continued from previous page

and an airport, although there is already an airport 30 kilometers away.

"The majority of the construction — as in restaurants, hotels and transport system — does not belong to the residents, but to external companies," reads an FDCZ document. "They do not establish any relationship with the local population and promote the exclusion of coastal populations from this whole process."

During the IADB conference in Fortaleza, a huge sector of the city is partitioned off to accommodate the delegates, and the level of aggravation is palpable. Children who normally sell ice cream, beaded jewelry or brightly-colored blankets have been forced off the beaches and streets. Roads, restaurants and cultural centers are closed off to residents.

The whole scenario renders a frightening vision of a future excluding Brazilians from their own territory, when the economy will be fully converted to a bedrock of tourism.

"You should have done like in Argentina and thrown stones at the cops," remarks a woman, barefoot in a floral yellow house dress, as she steps out of her backyard to find a flood of protesters running from police on horseback, after a crowd of 2,000 was tear-gassed. The 64-year-old university employee spoke on condition of anonymity because she fears the media.

"It's a dictatorship with makeup," she says of the current government, "but it's the fault of your country. The United States brings the misery to Brazil."

The U.S. has 50 percent of the vote that decides where the money loaned by the IADB actually goes, and usually votes to give it to multilateral institutions, banks and corporations. The woman encourages a jaunt to the suburbs, where one can truly witness the misery of the IADB's operations. "The [IADB] is giving money, but they are also taking interest and they are taking it from the poor,"

she says. "We have to fight."

'NOT A SUPERMAN'

"I have not had to see any protests, thankfully, because of the tight security," admits Kazayuki Mai from the Bank of Japan. "In Brazil, even Arabs and Jews make friends," he laughs.

Enrique Iglesias, president of the IADB, says its actions are supported by Latin American governments and are therefore justifiable. He fails to recognize that these are notoriously corrupt governments comprised of fellow shareholders in IADB projects.

"These are democratic governments — they were elected," Iglesias told the *Independent*. "So they are the representation of the people who voted for them — it's not up to us whether [the people] think so or not. Don't forget that we are an institution owned by governments and I am an employee of the government. We may make mistakes but overall I think it's good for the economy of the region."

The IADB also fails to look at long-term economic effects of tourism. While Ricardo Santiago, IADB Manager of the Regional Operations Department, points out that their projects create jobs, he does not address the question of sustainability. If a hurricane hits or some other unforeseeable disaster causes tourism to abate, what is left of an economy based almost entirely in that industry?

"This country is poor," Santiago says. "But it is also the job of other countries in the world to open up their markets so this country can export. The IADB is not Superman. It cannot solve the problem of the hungry in this country."

But they can supply computers.

Iglesias has said that all children now in the first grade should complete their remaining 11 years in school. This



Brazilians protest in March during the IADB annual meeting in Fortaleza.

goal could be realized, he believes, if they speed up public access to the Internet. It is this sort of inappropriate remedy that displays the IADB's "success," intended for the benefit of foreign investors rather the needs of people in the region.

As for Santiago's claim that Brazil needs to increase exports, the Movimento Sem Terra (Landless Movement) charges that agriculture has been increasingly reliant on export, resulting in family farms being gobbled up while workers live like serfs on huge agribusiness plots, growing crops for North Americans as locals literally starve to death.

"The real issue," explains Italian Minister of Foreign Commerce Piero Fassolini, "is fighting poverty. It's about equations and joint solutions. If you live in a household and your income is 100 units, you have a certain expenditure and must find a way to amend your budget. You can't spend more than what you have."

"It is an equation," he reiterates.

For the IADB, the issues are equations. Facts and figures. Starving children, AIDS, the drug trade, girls raped before age 12. It's only the numbers that matter. Two plus two equals no bananas for those growing them. But for Felipe, who wants a mouthful of food more than a new computer he can't use or a new book he doesn't know how to read, the numbers just don't add up.

PEASANTS FIGHT FOR LAND IN GUATEMALA

BY JUAN C. ORDÓÑEZ

An increasing number of land invasions by destitute campesinos (farmers) in Guatemala are testing the limits of the country's 1996 peace treaty, which ended Central America's longest and bloodiest civil war.

Since October of last year, landless Mayas have invaded dozens of *fincas* (or plantations) throughout the country. In April alone, hundreds of peasants affiliated with the National Indigenous and Farmers Coordinating Organization (CONIC) seized 19 fincas. The 80,000-member organization accuses the government of failing to increase land access, one of the treaty's goals.

Guatemala has one of Latin America's highest levels of inequality. By some accounts, two percent of the population controls 70 percent of Guatemalan farmland. Of the 58 percent of the population who live in extreme poverty, four-fifths are Maya. It was also the Maya who bore the brunt of the 36-year civil war that killed over 200,000 people.

Although the 1996 peace treaty called for increased land access through the creation of a Land Fund, it did not specify timetables for land redistribution. Instead, the Fund was designed to extend credit to peasants for the purchase of land and "promote the establishment of a transparent land market."

The Land Fund's impact, however, has been "insignificant," according to CONIC. Some blame the lack of

progress on corruption within the Fund, which saw several top officials resign in March amid revelations of crooked land deals. Others argue that the Land Fund's market-based model, adopted at the urging of the World Bank, is not only unable to resolve the structural imbalances but aggravates the problem by burdening campesinos with debt. As a recent CONIC study notes, in the five years since the signing of the peace treaty and the adoption of the market-based model, rural conditions have actually worsened.

In some rural areas, conditions have deteriorated to the point of famine, unlike any seen in the Americas in recent memory. Over the past year, famine has reportedly claimed the lives of 126 children. Another 60,000 children suffer from acute malnourishment, according to the United Nations World Food Program. Though the famine is concentrated in the eastern part of the country, which has been afflicted by successive

droughts, the high level of rural unemployment has exacerbated the problem.

"There is hunger in the countryside," says Juan Tiney of CONIC. "People are running out of patience and they are left with no option but to invade." In some of the invasions, the campesinos claim to be the rightful owners of the land.

Guatemala's business community has condemned the land invasions, many of which have ended in forcible evictions. Demanding respect for property rights, the head of the private Agricultural Chamber warns that the invasions threaten the country's governability. The head of the national coffee growers' association, Anacafe, charges that the invasions "blatantly violate the law" and "have great repercussions for the entire country."

Indeed, repercussions have been widely felt throughout Guatemala. On April 19, the Union of Labor and Popular Action, an umbrella organization made up of labor groups, announced its support for the land takeovers, and backed up its words a few days later by blocking traffic in Guatemala City by using burning tires as barricades. And on April 23, campesinos occupied offices of the Land Fund in the department of Peten and city of Coban.

Violence against protesters is also on the rise. One campesino activist was shot and killed in the department of Izabal, with some witnesses blaming the murder on a paramilitary group. Other campesinos, including Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini Imeri of San Marcos, who supported the March takeover of a finca in Malacatan, report receiving death threats.

"What they really want is to terrorize us, to make us afraid," says Bishop Ramazzini. "The conflicts in this diocese are just a few of the conflicts over land throughout the country, and landowners are worried that what's happening here could be the spark that will set off a big fire. So they want to stop it here."



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Venezuela:

STILL A THREAT TO U.S. DOMINANCE

BY MIKE BURKE

In Quebec City in April 2001, on one of his first trips out of the country, George W. Bush pledged with 33 hemispheric leaders, including Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, to uphold democracies throughout the Americas.

"Any unconstitutional alteration or interruption of the democratic order in a state of the hemisphere constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to the participation of that state's government in the Summit of the Americas process," they agreed.

The pledge didn't last long.

The Bush Administration first considered overthrowing the Chavez government last June, a former U.S. intelligence officer told the *UK Guardian*. Chavez, a democratically elected but controversial leader who rejected neo-liberal economic policies, heads a nation that supplies the U.S. with 1.5 million barrels of oil per day.

In November, State Department, Pentagon and National Security Agency officials held three days of closed-door discussions on Venezuela. A month later, a *San Francisco Examiner* headline read "U.S. Cooking Up a Coup in Venezuela?" Meanwhile, the National Endowment for Democracy budget to fund Chavez opposition groups quadrupled in 2001 to \$877,000, including \$154,377 to the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, the international arm of the AFL-CIO.

When the coup finally happened on April 11, the U.S. denied any involvement, but quickly praised the results.

"We wish to express our solidarity with the Venezuelan people and look forward to working with all democratic forces in Venezuela to ensure the full expression of democratic rights," a State Department spokesperson said on April 12, after Chavez was detained and businessman Pedro Carmona took power.

Carmona showed his commitment to democracy by abolishing the Supreme Court and National Assembly and arresting scores of elected politicians loyal to Chavez.

A *Chicago Tribune* editorial celebrated: "It's not every day that a democracy benefits from the military's intervention to force out an elected president."

However, under extraordinary circumstances Chavez — who never resigned despite such statements by the State Department — resumed power within 48 hours. According to a report by BBC investigative reporter Greg Palast, Chavez received warning of an imminent coup from a Venezuelan official in OPEC. Chavez stationed hundreds of loyal troops in secret corridors of the presidential compound and his supporters began to rally hundreds of thousands of loyalists in the street. After Carmona took power, a Chavez insider soon issued an ultimatum to the new regime: leave office in 24 hours or else. The plan worked.

While evidence of U.S. involvement continues to emerge, the Bush Administration maintains its innocence and the U.S. media has done little to uncover the full story. Palast's story — which aired on the British equivalent of "60 Minutes," BBC "Newsnight" — was ignored by every major American media outlet.

The proof is growing: Chavez claims he has radar images showing what are believed to be a U.S. Navy vessel, plane and helicopter illegally stationed near the Venezuelan shore. He also says two U.S. military officers regularly visited the coup headquarters. An unnamed Defense Department official admitted to *The New York Times* that high-level Bush appointees met with the coup leaders: "We were not discouraging people," the official said. "We were sending informal, subtle signals that we don't like this guy. We didn't say, 'No, don't you dare.'"



Double Cross: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez meets with former U.S. President George Bush during friendlier times.

"In the end what really galled the Bush Administration and the U.S. is that Chavez has provided an alternative to the globalization consensus, globalization under the terms of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the IMF."

— **BBC reporter Greg Palast, in an interview with THE INDEPENDENT**

The *Observer* reports that Otto Reich, Elliot Abrams and John Negroponte, three members of the Bush Administration who have extensive backgrounds in covert and illegal actions in Latin America, played key roles and backed the coup.

Reich, senior White House policy advisor on Latin America, headed Reagan's Office of Public Diplomacy, which illegally fed anti-Sandinista propaganda to the U.S. public. He reportedly met several times with Carmona, the coup leader.

National Security Council member Abrams, who was convicted in the Iran-Contra affair for misleading Congress, reportedly gave his approval to the coup.

Negroponte, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, served as Reagan's ambassador to Honduras when U.S.-trained death squads terrorized the nation.

But why the high level of U.S. interest?

Oil, for sure. But also Venezuela's rejection of globalization and neo-liberal economics, according to experts.

"In the end what really galled the Bush Administration and the U.S. is that Chavez has provided an alternative to the globalization consensus, globalization under the terms of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the IMF," said Palast, who traveled to Venezuela, in mid-April. In an interview with the *Independent* he recalled what a member of Chavez's cabinet told him: "Our example is basically succeeding and they can't let us succeed, for if we succeed it is an example for all of the Americas."

While the U.S. government and media have associated Chavez with the Saddam Husseins, Osama bin Ladens and the Kim Jong IIs of the world, Palast reports otherwise.

"What Chavez has provided is something that is a strengthened form of what used to be considered liberal.... He is for land reform. He is for better terms of trade. He is against free trade but for internal development. He is for redistribution of income and social welfare. His first act in office when he returned from being kidnapped during the coup d'etat was to raise the minimum wage by 20 percent," Palast said. "These are measures that 20 or 30 years ago or when John Kennedy was president of the U.S. would have been considered your typical moderate progressive actions. Today they are considered unacceptably radical."

The overall success of Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution, as he calls it, remains to be seen as the nation's economy faces tough times. But much has improved in Venezuela, economically and socially, since his 1998 election, according to Conn Hallina, an expert with Foreign Policy in Focus. The nation's inflation rate dropped from 40 to 12 percent, 1 million more students attend primary school, the economy has grown by 4 percent, infant mortality and unemployment have dropped, and oil giants Phillips Petroleum and Exxon/Mobil were forced to renegotiate contracts.

Oil companies, union members, business leaders and the private media protested Chavez's reforms, which decreased corporate profits and forced out top union officials. However, such policies have been widely popular with the underclass who constitute a majority of the population. The government characterizes 80 percent of the population as "poor"; meanwhile, the richest two percent of the nation owns 60 percent of the land. With much of the vote in hand, Chavez has been twice elected to office by margins Bush could only dream of, taking 60 percent of the electorate in 2000.

While the poor remain strong supporters, the future of Chavez remains questionable. Venezuela faces a projected \$8 billion deficit this year, as foreign investors have pulled out of Venezuela and the price of oil remains low; 40 percent of government income and 80 percent of export revenue is generated from oil. Chavez must also pay off over \$20 billion in debts from earlier administrations. Another coup would surprise few.

In an interview with the Spanish paper *El Pais* on the eve of the April 11 coup, Chavez told reporter Ignacio Ramonet: "They prepare a coup, and if they fail, they will prepare an attack."

FIRST PERSON

FAMILY RECONCILIATION

Gay Son and Palestinian Father Resume Peace Process

BY MUBARAK DAHIR

My father and I have been waging a family war over my sexuality for more than a decade. But today that very personal battle, which has often consumed me in waves of anger and guilt and recrimination, seems almost irrelevant.

Regardless of what my father has done to me as his gay son, regardless of the rejection and hurt and betrayal, I do not want him to die at the hands of Israeli army bullets or advancing tanks.

These days, more than ever, that is a real fear and possibility.

Sabir, my father, is now 79 years old. He lives in his native Palestinian village just a mile from Ramallah, home of the Palestinian Authority headquarters where Yassir Arafat was holed up for weeks in a candlelit office while Israeli army tanks smashed through the concrete walls just outside, splattered the surrounding buildings with gunfire and kept an entire city under curfew and siege. I knew even then that they were trying to demolish not just Arafat's compound, but the very foundations of a would-be Palestinian state, and with it, the hopes of an entire people.

From my apartment in Queens, I watched the television news nervously and read newspaper reports with great apprehension as Israeli tanks rolled first into Ramallah, then Bethlehem, Nablus and other Palestinian cities, culminating in the terror and destruction that laid waste to the Jenin refugee camp.

On TV, I watched the Israeli rituals of mass humiliation and punishment, as the Israelis rounded up thousands of men for "questioning" and bulldozed hundreds of homes. These acts of collective humiliation are a familiar sight to any Palestinian, a sight I grew accustomed to when I lived in the West Bank 20 years ago.

I remembered the first time an Israeli soldier pointed his weapon at me — a weapon, in all probability, made in the U. S. — and told me to follow him.

I was just 15 years old, crossing the border from Jordan, where we lived, to the West Bank, where we are from. It was the first time I had ever made the journey.

Though I was born in Jerusalem, my family moved back to the United States when I was just two. When I was 15, my professor father took a job teaching at the University of Jordan precisely so his American-raised children could go back to the homeland they didn't remember.

To go from Amman, Jordan to our ancestral Palestinian village, we had to cross the Israeli checkpoint on the Jordan River. There were actually two checkpoints: one for people with foreign passports, and another for Palestinians with Jordanian passports or Israeli-issued ID cards. Because we held American passports, the bus always dropped my family at the checkpoint for foreigners.

But when the Israeli border patrol saw that my father, sister and I were born in Palestine, we were quickly escorted via gunpoint to the large, barn-like structure where Palestinians were processed.

There, an Israeli soldier used his weapon to point me into a small cell, where he ordered me to take off all my clothes. He left the cell, taking my shoes to X-ray them, and returned with a metal detector, which he passed over my naked body. Before he let me go, he told me to bend over, and he put the metal detector between my bare buttocks as a final insult.

I became used to the drill over the years, as we passed

frequently between Amman and the West Bank. Every time, my father, sister and I were pulled out of the crowd of tourists at the border crossing, and marched to a hidden humiliation on the Palestinian side.

In Israel's new actions, I recognize the long-running themes of humiliation and subjugation that have for too long been part of everyday life for Palestinians at the hands of Israelis.

I sigh with some relief that my father is too old to suffer the particular humiliation of being rounded up. But I know that bullets and bombs do not spare the elderly, and I worry that he may fall victim to the violence, that his body could be just another number in the rising death rate of Palestinians who have suffered about four times as many deaths as Israelis since the latest intifada, or uprising, began.

"A year after they returned to the Middle East, my father took unexpected, drastic measures to deal with the fact that I, his only son, was a gay man who would not produce a male offspring to carry on the family name."

I realize that I can't remember the last time I actually spoke with my father. Perhaps it was 18 months ago, when the new intifada got under way. Maybe it was even longer than that.

I have been answering his letters for about two years, after spending 11 years ignoring his letters that clamored to maintain our father and son relationship. For me, he severed that relationship in 1989, when he fractured our family into pieces.

Soon after discovering I was gay, my father retired as a college professor in the U.S. and returned once more to his homeland with his American wife, my mother. The move had long been expected, as my father had always talked about going "back home." My mother, who had spent ten years of her life in the Middle East, learned a new language and adopted a new culture, happily followed the man she had loved for 30 years.

But a year after they returned to the Middle East, my father took unexpected, drastic measures to deal with the fact that I, his only son, was a gay man who would not produce a male offspring to carry on the family name. He divorced my mother, leaving her homeless and penniless.

Then 67 years old, he wed a woman 40 years his junior through an arranged marriage, with the sole purpose of producing new baby boys, straight ones this time, he hoped, who would bear him grandchildren, heirs to the family name.

He got his wish, fathering four more children, two of them boys. But with that, he lost his first son, forever. Or so I thought.

After my mother died two and a half years ago, I surprised even myself with the decision that I needed to reestablish some kind of contact with my father. Not knowing what to expect, I finally answered one of his letters.

He seemed happy to hear from me, but showed no

remorse for what he had done. I finally accepted he would never say he was sorry.

Even worse, it became clear after a few letters and phone calls that he was still trying to manipulate the conditions of our relationship. The number one sticking point: He didn't want to hear the gay details of my life. It wasn't long before I lost heart in our fragile, faltering and flawed peace process. Our contact dwindled to the occasional e-mail.

But now it is all-out war, and I realize for the first time that my father really could die, and with him, any hopes of salvaging a peace to our family's past.

At the urging of my lover, I skip the e-mail and pick up the phone.

The connection is so scratchy, I can barely make out my father's voice when he answers his cell phone. Six times, we get cut off. Six times, I call back.

Yelling over the static and the years of estrangement, my father tells me how, for many months, even before the all-out Israeli invasion, they had only been allowed to go the mile to Ramallah on foot because cars and buses were banned. Now, they are not even allowed to make the walk. The village survives on local fruits and vegetables, and bread baked in another village — one to which people are still permitted to walk — a mile in the opposite direction from Ramallah.

An Israeli military checkpoint is directly in front of my father's house, because the road splits there. Most days, nothing and no one gets past.

Some nights, says my father, Israeli soldiers conduct military exercises through the streets of the village, yelling and running and shooting their guns in the air. Mostly, they mean it as a reminder, to let the Palestinians know they are still there, that the war goes on.

I think about our own personal war as my father fills in the desperate details. The children have not been to school in weeks. Because of roadblocks, it's been a year since he's been able to reach the university where he used to teach. It's impossible to make his way into Ramallah even to see a doctor and get his blood pressure and diabetes medicine.

"We are all in one big jail," he tells me. "We feel the noose tightening around our necks."

I do not talk about my gay life, or even mention the lover who was so instrumental to the call taking place.

But for once, that doesn't seem to matter. In this season of war, I decide, it is finally time for a personal cease-fire.

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Kristen Schurr, of Direct Action Palestine, stands against the Israeli occupation.

(Editors' Note: Kristen Schurr is a NYC journalist and activist who traveled in Palestine with International Solidarity Movement and Direct Action Palestine and as a reporter for Free Speech Radio News. Schurr was the first journalist to enter the besieged Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on May 2.)

BY KRISTEN SCHURR

"Now we know that not everyone has forgotten the Palestinian people," I was told after I slid through the Door of Humility into Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

Nine other international activists and I had just outrun Israeli soldiers who had been assaulting the church since late March. Carrying rice, lentils and salt, we were welcomed by 150 cheering Palestinians who lived without proper food, water, electricity or medical supplies for a month.

International law, including the 4th and 23rd Geneva Conventions, which bar armies from using starvation and prevention of medical attention as weapons of war, was useless here. As the head of a Palestinian NGO in Gaza City told me, all Geneva Conventions, U.N. Resolutions and the Declaration of Human Rights should read, "Applies to everyone except Palestinians."

Inside the church, many Palestinians were too ill from starvation and seizures, or too injured by Israeli bullets, to ever leave their makeshift beds, which consisted of a blanket on the floor. However, Palestinians were more concerned with my safety than with their own, so I was given the sweet spot to sleep — inside the grotto where Christians believe Jesus was born. In the early mornings, priests sang low hymns and took communion amidst golden red candlelight flickering on ancient walls.

After the first couple of nights, I moved up the steps to where many of those who ended up on Israeli's de facto "most wanted" list slept. Some were placed on the list because they resisted the illegal Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. One found himself on the list because a friend of his was on it. When the Israeli siege on the church ended, 13 were awaiting exile in Cyprus, 26 were banished to Gaza and the rest were sent to an Israeli military camp outside of Bethlehem for interrogation. None knew which fate awaited them until the last few days. I was told, "In the eyes of the Israelis, all Palestinians are wanted."

Several of these men became my closest friends. They made space for me and my blanket on the floor next to them and called me their sister. They gave me drags off their precious cigarettes, smuggled inside the robes of the priests who said what the Israelis were doing was "wicked."

A Palestinian policeman gave me his *keffiyeh* to wear when I looked cold one evening in the church. The next morning, he shaved his month-old beard and was smiling after talking to his wife and children via cell phone. He hoped to see them soon, anticipating that a deal would be struck between the dissembling butcher Sharon and the Palestinian Authority.

But an Israeli sniper shot him in the left lung. He bled to death within an hour. In an effort to legitimize the murder, the Israelis lied: they said he was armed and shooting at them, adding him to their list of the 13 most wanted. In reality, he was hanging his wash when he was shot.

I gathered leaves from the lemon trees in the church's courtyard with a man with round brown eyes who took the Palestinian flag pin off his shirt and traded with me for the one on my sweater. He was one of the 13, as was an elderly man who smiled at me and gave me his turquoise ring. The family I lived with in a Bethlehem refugee camp a month earlier called friends inside the church, asking them to look out for me. They told me the father of the family cried when he saw me on the news running inside with food.

The last three nights of 39 under siege, spent threatened and surrounded by Israeli snipers, tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers were marked by a soft-spoken young

LIFE & DEATH IN BETHLEHEM

A View From Inside the Besieged Church of the Nativity

Palestinian man who told me over and over, "Tonight is the last night." His hope and his despair were palpable. Many of the trapped Palestinians told me they would rather be dead than inside the hell that the church became. They were cold and starving, without freedom of movement or freedom from fear, subsisting on kindness and the bits of food occasionally smuggled through the maze of Israeli snipers.

The Palestinian women of Bethlehem were able to do what the Israeli military tried to prevent and what most of the international community failed to do. One 74-year-old woman, who snuck food inside the church through the south entrance, was found out by Israeli soldiers. They trashed her house and broke her hands. Hours before we arrived, 40 of the starving Palestinians had been on the verge of giving themselves up to the Israeli soldiers who, they expected, would torture and jail them, if not kill them. The days that food arrived were celebrations. One said, "It's sweeter when it's shared," about the cup of tea passed round between 10 people.

On the last day, my closest friend in the church slumped against a column in the Basilica and cried. He said the Israelis broke something unbreakable. His best friends, closer to him than brothers, were torn from him. One to Cyprus, the other to Gaza, he to interrogation and then to release in Bethlehem. He told me, as I sat with him in the last moments before he left the church, "The Israelis — the government and the military — kill everything that is alive."

After Oslo, he had held some hope and began to build a house made of cinderblock atop his family's in a Bethlehem refugee camp, but Israeli snipers continually shot as he built and he gave up on creating, trying only to repair the damage. There is no space to build out. As Palestinians wait for U.N. Resolution 194, the Right of Return, to be honored, there is nowhere to build but up.

He will never see his friends again, unless there is a Palestinian state. Then, he says, we will all have the Right of Return.

The 26 Palestinians from the church sent to Gaza are in effective exile. No Palestinian can travel between the West Bank and Gaza. One of the 26 could not bear to tell his family when he found out that he was to be sent there. The night that he finally called his wife and his children to say goodbye, he cried on his blanket for a minute and then stopped. He said, "They are all sobbing, but what can we do? This is the life." The Gaza Strip, 26 miles long, can take two days to pass through, due to illegal Israeli settlements and checkpoints. At 35 years old, one woman living in Gaza City has never been allowed outside of the Gaza Strip.

That is life even without an incursion: the daily humiliation of being forced to wait in line to get through a checkpoint dividing a Palestinian town in two, to risk being shot and killed for walking down the street, to be unable to control your electricity or water supply, to have your schools targeted by tank shells. That is life under Occupation.

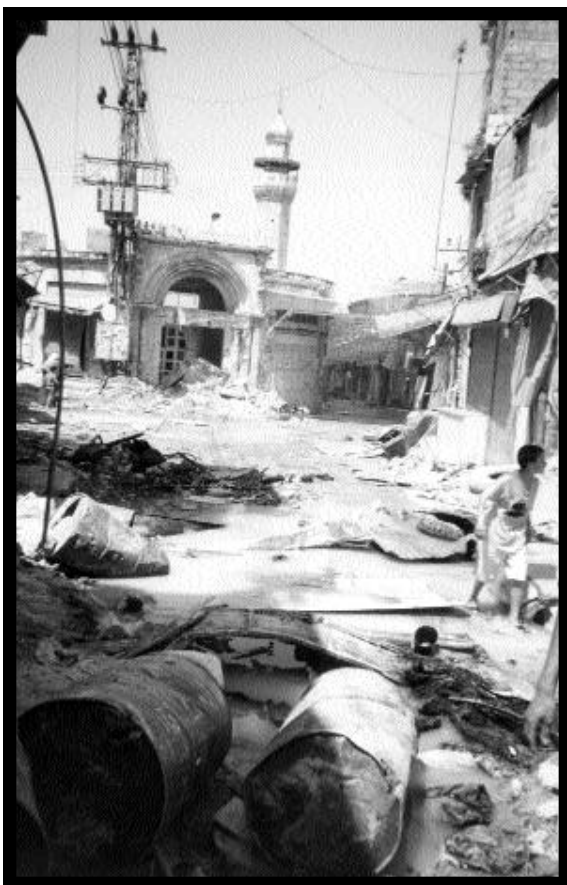
There is no peace in sitting quietly behind barbed wire. But a man inside a Bethlehem refugee camp said that if he told his young son what his rights were, it was like telling him to go and die. Dignity and resistance are criminalized by Israelis, but not abandoned by Palestinians.

After being deported on May 16, I am now among those waiting to return. Regardless of repeated assurances to the contrary, the Israeli military stormed the church as the internationals waited for them to pull out of Bethlehem. They ripped the film from my camera and dumped me in prison.

First was a jail in the illegal Israeli settlement Maale Aduumin, on stolen land that until 1996 was home to hundreds of Palestinians and Bedouins, subsequently forced to make a home two miles away at a garbage dump. Next I was taken in shackles to Ramle Prison, home to many Palestinian

political prisoners. After a week-long hunger strike, repeated strip searches, without access to phones and with disinterested counsel (who, at our one meeting, told me he was quite friendly with the prisons heads, yet had never been to the West Bank), an Israeli judge accused me of conspiring with the enemy and signed my deportation order.

Since I was deported three days ago, I've been carrying around a card a friend in Gaza City gave me. It says, "We are returning to our Beloved Palestine."



Mideast Leaders Face Discontent

BY A.K. GUPTA

If all was going to plan right now, George Bush would be preparing for a lovely little war in Iraq. But there's a fly in the ointment: Namely, the rest of the Middle East. The Bush Administration hadn't counted on millions throughout the Arab world flooding the streets in outrage at Israel's assault on Palestinians.

The growing unrest began to threaten the stability of U.S.-backed rulers. To impress the gravity of the situation upon him, Saudi's Crown Prince Abdullah went to Bush's "Western White House" in Texas. *The New York Times* described the President as a nervous host, shifting from foot to foot as he awaited the Prince's arrival. Bush was likely pondering reports that the Saudis were threat-



HEATHER HADDON

ening to use oil as a weapon, raising specters of his presidency and crusade dying at the gas pump.

The protests were fueled by anger at Israel and its U.S. sponsor, but quickly took on their own governments. In Egypt, according to an article by Paul Schemm (MERIP Press Information Note 90), "The demonstrators' slogans started out condemning Israel, but not long into each rally, the Egyptian government came in for criticism as well. 'I've been an activist for years,' said one student, 'and I've never seen them attack Mubarak so directly.'"

Experts had been telling the White House for months that Arab regimes were so cowed or compromised, they posed no impediment to ousting Saddam Hussein. No one counted on the people in the streets.

Demonstrations blossomed all over the Arab world. In Morocco, a massive pro-Palestinian demonstration drew over 500,000 people on April 7. Beforehand, in the capital of Rabat, stickers began to appear with the slogan, "We are all Palestinians." When the young King Mohammed greeted U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell the next day, he bore the same sticker over his heart.

This was just the beginning of what many in Washington admit was a disastrous trip by Powell to shore up support for the U.S. war on terrorism. While Bush was publicly calling for Sharon to end the assault, he wasn't actually doing anything to rein him in — a point obvious to all.

Bush's anointing of Sharon as "a man of peace" while the latter was raining missiles on Palestinians didn't help matters for his Arab friends.

They've been the most vulnerable to popular anger. Four of them — Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain and Yemen — saw protesters die in clashes with police, creating home-grown martyrs for the Palestinian cause.

Pro-U.S. regimes have been left making futile gestures that underscore their irrelevance. In response to Israel's attack, Jordan called for Israel to be suspended

from an international soccer federation, which went nowhere. It's been able to contain the disquiet, but it's banking continued peace on the White House actually securing a real solution, something few expect.

Even for longtime U.S. adversaries, support for the Palestinians is a double-edged sword. Syria has been at the forefront of political, diplomatic and material support for the intifada. However, the weekly demonstrations since September 2000 are no longer content to confine themselves to the Palestinians. According to a report in *Middle East International*, fliers in Damascus began circulating, at first "in support of the intifada and Arafat. Then they began calling for the release of political prisoners. Then the protests themselves began demanding the release of detainees, and an end to martial law and arbitrary rulings."

It would be a mistake to think the rumblings of dis-

BEYOND ARAFAT: PALESTINIANS SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY

Now that Yassir Arafat has been released from his stockade, Ariel Sharon and George Bush want to put him out to pasture. They're seizing on widespread discontent among Palestinians with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to argue that he must be pushed aside for new leadership before any serious talks on statehood can begin.

Released from his Ramallah compound after nearly six months of imprisonment, Arafat is head of a non-functioning regime. His faded star was burnished during his confinement, but the conditions of his release, the lack of strategy, and perennial corruption and autocratic rule have stoked widespread criticism and even outright resistance to his rule.

In reality, Arafat has outlived his usefulness. He was allowed to return to the West Bank in 1994 with security forces trained and armed by the CIA and Israel to assume the day-to-day policing of the occupation. Despite increasing concessions over the years, Arafat told Palestinians his strategy would result in independence. Instead, land seizures, settlements, bypass roads and checkpoints spread as the goal of a viable state receded. (According to one international activist who was in Arafat's besieged compound, his cronies made millions building the checkpoints and roads ensnaring the Palestinians.)

The resulting intifada was hardly a surprise. But while the uprising has been successful in making Israel feel the cost of its occupation, Palestinian independence remains a dream.

Sifting through the wreckage of their battered statelet, Palestinians are now no longer shy about expressing discontent with Arafat and his inner circle. They are asking where the 50,000-strong security forces were during the Israeli assault. "Why didn't they fight?", one Palestinian officer in Beirut asked Robert Fisk of *The Independent* (London). The officer went on to observe, "All the men who were in the siege of Beirut 20 years ago were stuck in Gaza. There were none in Ramallah. They didn't destroy a single tank."

Even more disconcerting to Palestinians was the fact that Arafat negotiated his safe release while agreeing to exile 13 Palestinians from the Church of the Nativity to Cyprus.

A leader of Arafat's own Fatah faction was quoted in the Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, as saying that by

content present a serious threat to the regimes, at least right now. In Saudi Arabia, according to an analysis in the *World Policy Journal*, the al Saud family remains "firmly in control of the organizational structures through which popular discontent could be mobilized and organized into real political opposition: the domestic economy, the media, the armed forces, 'civil society.'"

But they aren't oblivious to the potential danger either. That's what sent the Saudi Prince to Texas. However much the populace may side with the Palestinians or Iraqis, the rulers are dependent on the West, in the form of aid or petro-dollars. What the client regimes want most is for the Palestinian problem to go away. It just sets a bad example for their own people who are also hungering for self-determination. And that's what frightens the Bush administration the most.

"agreeing to the arrangement, the Palestinian Authority was affording legitimacy to a policy of transfer by Israel." One Hamas leader, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, also quoted, said the pact was a "great disaster. The Israeli enemy is going to deny us our legitimacy, the legitimacy of our presence in Palestine, and the Palestinian Authority is about to implement this policy."

This much-derided policy is emblematic of Arafat's leadership. By concentrating power in his hands, Arafat has arrested the development of a democratic polity and hampered the intifada. By shutting out popular movements and the Islamist factions from power, Arafat has ensured that they pursue their own strategy to the detriment of all. Thus, writes journalist Mouin Rabbini, "...the coexistence and simultaneous pursuit of divergent strategies — simplistically stated, the PA's political/diplomatic track, Fatah's war of attrition and the Islamists' rather more far-reaching war — has severely undermined each one of them."

"In refusing to provide the factions, and particularly the Islamist opposition, with a meaningful role in the decision-making process," continues Rabbini, "...the Palestinian leadership has guaranteed the perpetuation of the organizational chaos which has so often characterized the Palestinian national movement."

The growing demands for reform and democracy, which Palestinians have been pushing for years, stem from the realization that a new strategy must be pursued, one that doesn't settle for an endless series of interim agreements.

Yet an interim accord is precisely the goal of Sharon and Bush. There is talk again of an international conference involving the U.S., Europe, Russia and select Middle East clients to solve the Palestinian "question." Palestinians reject this plan, though. If they are divided on how precisely to resist the occupation,

Palestinians are united in demanding that only the details of the Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 line must be further negotiated.

Same for the question of reform.

One senior Palestinian official told Phil Reeves, also of *The Independent*, that, "We would welcome real reforms...in our national interests. But we are not going to let the Americans impose reforms on us that are only meant to create power centers for certain individuals."

— A.K. GUPTA



TERROR STALKS GUJARAT

Hindu Nationalists Massacre Up To 2,000 in Northern India

COMPILED FROM HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT

On the morning of Feb. 27, a train carrying Hindu nationalists was set afire in the Indian town of Godhra following a dispute between the nationalists and Muslim vendors at the train station. Fifty-eight people were killed in the blaze, most of them women and children. Over the next three days in the state of Gujarat, mobs of Hindus murdered hundreds of Muslims, burned down homes and businesses and sent tens of thousands of other Muslims fleeing for their lives.

Unlike the killings at the train station, which the state police grudgingly admitted was the result of “a sudden, provocative incident,” the retaliatory rampage “was a carefully orchestrated attack against Muslims,” says Smita Narula of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in a new report. Narula says, “The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of the police and state government officials.”

The report, “We Have No Orders to Save You: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat,” details the extensive involvement of the police and the state’s ruling Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or Indian People’s Party, in the bloodletting. Below are excerpts from the report.

BACKGROUND TO THE VIOLENCE

Godhra, a city of 150,000, is evenly split between Hindus and Muslims, most of whom live in separate neighborhoods. Godhra was placed under curfew for a year after communal clashes in 1980. Serious clashes occurred again in 1992 after the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

The Godhra railway station is situated in an overwhelmingly Muslim section of the city. For three weeks preceding the killings, trains carrying Vishwa Hindu Parishad [World Hindu Council, or VHP] activists had been stopping in Godhra. The activists were coming to and from Ayodhya, where the VHP sought to begin construction of a Hindu temple on the disputed site of the mosque destroyed by Hindu activists there. The VHP leaders had set March 15, 2002, as a deadline to bring thousands of stone pillars to the site in order to begin construction of the temple.

There are significantly divergent accounts about the events leading to the dispute that resulted in the Godhra killings. HRW was not able to independently verify the accuracy of these varying accounts, but it was widely reported that a scuffle began between Muslim vendors and Hindu activists shortly after the train arrived at the station. The activists, who had been chanting Hindu nationalist slogans, were said to have refused to pay a vendor until he said “Jai Shri Ram” or “Praise Lord Ram.” As the train then tried to pull out of the station, the emergency brake was pulled and a Muslim mob attacked the train and set it on fire.

Initially Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi claimed that the killings were an “organized terrorist attack.” Federal government sources speculated that they were “premeditated,” or the work of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence. However, senior police officials in Gujarat have now concluded that the killings were “not preplanned.”

STATE AND POLICE PARTICIPATION

By the afternoon of Feb. 27 [following the attack on the train], retaliatory attacks had already begun.... Starting on the morning of Feb. 28, Hindu mobs unleashed a coordinated attack against Muslims in many of Gujarat’s towns and cities. Despite the state’s claims that police were simply overwhelmed by the sheer size of the Hindu mobs — often numbering in the thousands — evidence collected by the media, Indian human rights groups, and HRW all point to state sponsorship of the attacks.

Eyewitness accounts cited throughout this report, as well as the history of police and political recruitment demonstrate the state’s partisan role. In a matter of days, more than 850 people are known to have been killed — although unofficial estimates ran as high as 2,000. Violence continued as of this writing and has spread to poorly protected rural areas. Accounts of politicians directing the violence were also commonplace.

In Ahmedabad, Gujarat’s commercial capital and the site of HRW’s investigations, many attacks took place within view of police posts and police stations, in some cases no more than 50 feet from the site of burnt Muslim-owned restaurants, places of businesses, and hotels in Ahmedabad...

Attacks in Ahmedabad on Feb. 28 also began at precisely the same time, around 10:30 in the morning. Muslims living in “mixed communities,” that is, alongside Hindus, were hit the hardest.

Dozens of witnesses interviewed by HRW described almost identical operations. The attackers arrived by the thousands in trucks, clad in saffron scarves and khaki shorts, the signature uniform of Hindu nationalist, or Hinduvata, groups. Shouting slogans of incitement to kill, they were armed with swords, trishuls [trident-like weapons], sophisticated explosives and gas cylinders. Guided by computer printouts listing the addresses of Muslim families and their properties, information obtained from the Ahmedabad municipal corporation among other sources, they embarked on a murderous rampage.

In many cases the leaders of the attack, who communicated with one another on cell phones, receiving instructions in seemingly well-coordinated and planned operations, have been identified by name in police reports as members of the BJP and the VHP....

Testimonies collected by the Citizens’ Initiative, a coalition of over 25 NGOs, and submitted to the National Human Rights Commission are replete with incidents of gang rapes of Muslim girls and women and the role of the police during the attacks, particularly in Naroda Patia. These testimonies are cited as transcribed by the Citizens’ Initiative. A resident of Naroda Patia, Ahmedabad testified that eight out of 11 family members were killed on Feb. 28, two



The people of Gujarat bury their dead.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

after being raped. The surviving three members sustained serious injuries:

“It was morning and I was cooking. My husband, my three children and I were in my house while my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law and his wife along with their three children was in the adjoining house. A mob of 5,000 came and we started running. We were cornered from all the sides. SRP (State Reserve Police) personnel were also chasing us. The mob caught hold of my husband and hit him on his head twice with the sword. They threw petrol in his eyes and then burned him. My sister-in-law was stripped and raped. She had a three-month baby in her lap. They threw petrol on her and the child from her lap was thrown in the fire. My brother-in-law was hit in the head with the sword and he died on the spot. His six-year-old daughter was also hit with the sword and thrown in the fire. My mother-in-law had with her the grandson who was four years of age and he was burnt too. We were that time hiding on the terrace of a building. With her heavy body she was unable to climb the stairs so she was on the ground. My mother-in-law told them to take away whatever money she had but to spare the children. They took away all the money and jewelry and burnt the children with petrol. ([My] mother-in-law was raped too). I witnessed all this.”

POLICE GUNFIRE

Numerous eyewitnesses to the attacks in Ahmedabad told HRW that police gunfire paved the way for the violent mobs. During the first two days of violence, Chief Minister Modi defended the actions of his police, stating that they had “mowed down people” to quell the violence.

ATTACKS ON WOMEN

“I have never known a riot which has used the sexual subjugation of women so widely as an instrument of violence as in the recent mass barbarity in Gujarat. There are reports everywhere of gang-rape of young girls and women, often in the presence of member of their families, followed by their murder by burning alive, or by bludgeoning with a hammer... Women in the Aman Chowk shelter told appalling stories about how armed men disrobed themselves in front of a group of terrified women to cower them further.”

Even pregnant women were not spared....

A woman who washed the bodies of female victims before burial at the same site told HRW about the conditions of the bodies upon arrival:

“I washed the ladies’ bodies before burial. Some bodies had heads missing, some had hands missing, some were like coal, you would touch them and they would crumble. Some women’s bodies had been split down the middle. I washed 17 bodies on March 2, only one was intact.”

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HIMALAYAN VALLEYS FACE FLOODS

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the International Center For Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) report that 44 Himalayan glacial lakes in Nepal and Bhutan could overflow their banks and send millions of gallons of water gushing down inhabited valleys. The lakes are rapidly filling with icy water as global warming accelerates the melting of the glaciers and snowfields that feed them. In Nepal, for example, data from 49 monitoring stations reveals an increase in temperature since the mid-1970s with highest temperatures found at the higher altitudes. Pradeep Mool, a remote sensing expert with ICIMOD, said work is underway to lower the critical water levels of one glacial lake. Funds are urgently needed to carry out similar work on other lakes. "Mountains were once considered indomitable, unchanging and impregnable," said Klaus Toepfer, executive director of UNEP. "But we are learning that they are as vulnerable to environmental threats as the world's oceans, grasslands and forests."

POLITICAL VIOLENCE RISING IN GUATEMALA

On April 29, Guillermo Ovalle, an accountant for the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation, was shot dead in a cafeteria in Guatemala City. The police said the murder of 28-year-old Ovalle occurred during a robbery, but human rights advocates doubted that conclusion.

Staff of the Menchú Foundation, a prominent Guatemala City human rights organization named for and founded by the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, said that one of the alleged gunmen was previously spotted lurking outside the foundation's offices, raising the possibility that the robbery was a cover for a politically motivated murder.

Also, four forensic anthropologists who have unearthed the skeletons of thousands of victims of the 36-year civil war in Guatemala decided to leave the country in mid-May after they and their families were threatened with death, in some cases at gunpoint.

TACO BELL BOYCOTT HITS NATION'S CAMPUSES

About 700 students from at least 20 universities across the U.S. have joined a growing movement to boycott the global restaurant chain Taco Bell, which runs franchises at many of the nation's campuses. The boycott was initiated in April 2001 by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, who allege that the farm laborers who pick tomatoes used in Taco Bell products for Six Ls Packing Company in Immokalee, Florida are subject to exploitative labor practices and sub-poverty wages.

Students and NGOs have joined CIW in over 200 nationwide protests, demanding that Taco Bell, which grossed a reported \$5.2 billion profit in 1999, voluntarily pay one more cent per pound to the growers to pass on to workers. This would double their picking piece rate that has remained virtually unchanged for two decades. Romeo Ramirez, a coalition leader originally from Guatemala who began working in the fields at 15, said at a recent protest in Florida, "The [students] can't believe they're consuming this food at the cost of having workers in sweatshop-like conditions in the fields."

For more information, go to
www.ciw-online.org.

U.S. REJECTS WAR CRIMES COURT

BUSH ADMINISTRATION FEARS NEW LAWS WOULD APPLY TO AMERICANS TOO

BY LAURA CAMPAGNA AND PAM SPEES

On May 6, in an act of unilateralism that shocked the international community, the U.S. administration renounced its signature to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), a treaty creating the first permanent international court in history to prosecute crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and acts of aggression.

"The world needs a non-selective mechanism of justice and the ICC is the best effort to date," said Vivian Stromberg, executive director of MADRE, a solidarity organization. "The U.S. won't be able to control this Court through the United Nations Security Council in the same way that it has influenced past efforts. That is why this government is so opposed to it."

According to Palitha Kohona, Chief of the Treaty Section at the United Nations, in the history of the United Nations no country has ever withdrawn its signature from a treaty. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights called the decision to withdraw from the treaty a "bad precedent" that could have "worrying implications" for other states bound by treaties.

In a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, U.S. officials declared that the withdrawal of President Clinton's signature from the statute exempts the U.S. from the treaty's legal obligations and from the future Court's jurisdiction. The "unsigned" effectively removes any burden on the U.S. to refrain from engaging in acts that would undermine the treaty.

"One worries that this is an additional reflection of extremism in international policy by the new U.S. government against international law and multilateralism," said William Pace, Convener of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court.

Explaining the withdrawal, U.S. officials have argued that the Court is a threat to U.S. sovereignty and that U.S. nationals would be vulnerable to politically motivated prosecutions before it. Human rights advocates familiar with the treaty say U.S. allegations that the ICC will invade national sovereignty or play host to politically motivated prosecutions are misleading and wrong.

"The treaty was designed with a respect for sovereignty and with safeguards against frivolous or politically motivated prosecutions," said Rhonda Copelon, director of the International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic at the City University of New York and Legal Advisor to the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice. "U.S. officials insisted on these provisions and know this very well but persist in alleging otherwise."

"The court reflects an international consensus which is moving toward a limitation on the use of force," Copelon said. "With a permanent international court it will be much harder to use all-out military force in response to a crime against humanity like Sept. 11 as opposed to justice," she said.

Stromberg, whose organization works with women's groups in parts of the world where U.S. policies or actions have contributed to the destabilization of communities, agrees. "The U.S. has consistently avoided accountability for human rights violations stemming from its foreign policy, such as the massacres of Korean and Vietnamese civilians by U.S. forces, the mining of Nicaragua's harbors and the denial of food and medicine to the people of Cuba and Iraq, all committed with the impunity of the powerful," she said.

In a statement on the U.S. decision to renounce the signature, Under-Secretary of State Marc Grossman emphasized the importance of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security. The ICC, according to Grossman and the U.S. administration, threatens the U.N. system by not putting the cases it can try under the jurisdiction of the Security Council.

Proponents of the Court dismiss the U.S. argument as an attempt to make the Court's cases subject to a Council veto.

"The U.S. claim that the Court would be less political if it were subordinate to the Security Council is blatantly laughable," Pace said.

"The U.S. has consistently used its seat on the Security Council to ensure that human rights violations of its close allies go unpunished," Stromberg said. "In the case of Israel, the U.S. has vetoed over 30 U.N. resolutions condemning Israeli human rights violations and violations of international law."

Since the requisite 60 countries have now ratified the treaty and brought it into force, the ICC will take effect as of July 1, 2002. Because the Court will only be able to exercise jurisdiction in situations where national systems of justice have been unwilling or unable to genuinely investigate and prosecute crimes, countries will need to change or adapt their laws to conform to the Rome Statute.

Women's groups are looking forward to the moment the Court's jurisdiction takes effect. "Crimes of sexual and gender violence in armed conflict have too often been

ignored by the international community," said Copelon.

"Explicit recognition of a broad range of crimes against women together with equality of representation among judges and prosecutions and continued work by women's movements will finally ensure that crimes against women will get the attention they have been denied," she said.

Activists see the statute's inclusion of these crimes as significant for women and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people all over the world. Crimes such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization have been included in the Rome Statute as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Trafficking in women and gender-based persecution are also included as crimes against humanity.

These gains were won against significant opposition from conservative Catholic countries led by the Holy See as well as fundamentalist Islamic nations.



Activists at the U.N.: (from top to bottom:
Zieba Shorish-Shamley,
Rhonda Copelon, Rashida
Manjoo and Vahida
Nainar.

WOMEN STILL PLAGUED BY “HONOR” KILLINGS

BY PRIYA REDDY

Thirteen-year-old Dilber Kina talked to boys on the street, according to her father. When she ran away from home, she was the subject of even more neighborhood gossip. As reported last August by the *International Herald Tribune*, “when she tried to run away yet again, Mr. Kina grabbed a kitchen knife and an ax and stabbed and beat the girl until she lay dead in the blood-smeared bathroom of the family’s Istanbul apartment....The girl’s head had been so mutilated, the police said, that it was held together by a knotted cloth.

“I fulfilled my duty,” Kina told the police. “We killed her for going out with boys.”

Dilber Kina was murdered in the name of family “honor.” Family status and reputation, as defined by ancient cultural codes, depend largely on the perceived respectability of one’s daughters and can be damaged by the perceived misuse of their sexuality.

Women and girls are murdered for such “immoral behavior” as marital infidelity, refusing to submit to an arranged marriage, demanding a divorce, having premarital sex, flirting with or receiving phone calls from men, failing to serve a meal on time or “allowing” oneself to be raped. In the Turkish province of Sanliurfa, one

tries where honor killings occur are predominantly Muslim. In Egypt, law protects men who kill their wives for engaging in extramarital affairs.

“Men have absolute rule,” writes Amrani. “Women’s lives in themselves are considered valueless, even though they spend their short lifetimes with hard work and continual pregnancies.” In many Arab countries, women cannot vote.

In some of these cultures, women, according to Amrani, “are not free to leave their homes on their own, not allowed to drive, play musical instruments, dance, do any sports, work, go to school, receive proper medical care, cannot divorce their husbands, cannot even have custody over their own children, must wear burkas and cover themselves head to toe and see the world through a screen, and are forbidden to speak to any man who’s not a relative in public. Women are treated as sex objects whose duty it is to bear children and perform domestic chores.”

The United Nations finds that honor killings are increasing in countries as disparate as Brazil, Uganda, Britain, Ecuador, India, Israel, Italy, Sweden, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, where the practice was condoned under the rule of the fundamentalist Taliban movement.

Circumstances for women have changed little under the new U.S.-installed government, according to the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan.

A position paper on honor killings by the Muslim Women’s League states that “Muslims today must unequivocally reject this distortion of Islam that is used to violate the most basic Islamic rights of human decency, integrity and justice.

“Unwillingness on the part of the Muslim community to address these issues in a forthright and unapologetic manner is born out of an inherent distrust of perceived ‘Western’ attempts to taint the image of Islam in the interest of global politics. This is no excuse for us to turn a blind eye to injustices committed against

Muslims and others, especially when the perpetrators are members of the same faith.”

RAPE

Not long ago, Western courts demanded that a woman who “cried rape” publicly divulge her sexual history and that the prosecution show evidence of struggle by the victim against the alleged rape. In the U.S., of the women convicted for violent crimes, the vast majority are convicted for defending themselves or their children from physical abuse. According to the Women’s Criminal Justice Resource Center, average prison terms are twice as long for killing husbands as for killing wives.

Forty of the 153 inmates at Amman Women’s Prison in Jordan are under protective custody, at risk of falling victim to honor killings. These 40 are rape victims. Many of these women have been incarcerated for years.

Amrani writes, “In these cultures death to a woman is easily justified, and the only witness that counts in court is usually the man’s. She has no opportunity to defend herself, nor does anyone even care to hear any explanation from her side. If she tries to escape, chances are she will be hunted down and murdered.” Often a woman puts herself in jail for protection — but that is no guarantee of safety. Frequently she is raped or killed while in jail. “Any way you look at it,” says Amrani, “the woman is already dead.”

– warcry@indymedia.org

EAST TIMOR DISPATCHES

BY SIMBA RUSSEAU

Editors’ Note: On May 20, a quarter-century after Indonesia illegally invaded East Timor, the former Portuguese colony became the world’s newest country. Despite the celebrations, East Timor is still suffering immensely from the U.S.-backed occupation during which the Indonesian military massacred more than 200,000 Timorese — about one-third of the island’s population.

Simba Rousseau, a journalist with the New York City Independent Media Center, traveled to Dili to witness East Timor’s first independence day.

Below are excerpts from dispatches she filed from East Timor. Visit www.nyc.indymedia.org for her full reports.

May 16

As we drove through the town, I saw shack houses, burned-downed buildings, children and elders hustling and begging and the U.S. dollar ruling the currency and the Australians handling the economy. Australians moved in to set up hotels and restaurants to cater to the residing United Nations Peacekeeping forces and when the U.N. leaves, so will the economy leaving this already poor country without a proper transition into independence.

May 17

Emotions are rising as the days tick down to the declaration of independence for the Timorese people. As you move through the streets of Dili, you can see the independence flags, hats and t-shirts hitting the streets for the coming celebrations. “We are ready for independence but we are also aware of the questions ahead when the United Nations and the Australians leave and take our jobs and economy with them,” states Abrao, a 20-year-old journalist with camera in hand and his last roll of film.

May 19

Today, on the eve of the independence ceremonies for East Timor, many of the international delegates arrived to address the press. At one press conference, Australian President John Howard was greeted by members of the International Solidarity Movement of West Papua and Aceh. Young and old, the activists were holding signs stating, “Hands off our oil” and “Now economic independence!”

They were also calling for new negotiations on the issue of the Timor Gap which was initially negotiated without the participation of the Timorese people. One of the organizers told me, “We have a new parliament tonight and one is not in place as of yet, so we are calling for new negotiations involving the Timor Gap with our new government and for the Xanana and the internationals to take a position on the liberation of West Papua and Aceh.”

May 20

East Timor became the world’s newest nation as the United Nations transitional government handed power over to newly elected democratic President Xanana Gusmao. This historic event was held in the main city of East Timor, Dili, before a crowd of over 200,000 Timorese.

Emotions were high as the midnight hour struck and the United Nations flag, which had flown for the past two and a half years, was lowered and the East Timor flag raised. During the changes, films about the history of the struggle of the Timorese people were shown on large screens for all to see, reminding the nation of the destruction of nearly 24 years of Indonesian occupation and international support for the invasion of East Timor.

As the Timorese flag is raised, a new set of challenges arise for this nation, which also enters as one of the world’s poorest countries with 41 percent of the population living in poverty.



young woman’s throat was slit in the town square because a love song was dedicated to her over the radio.

Given that so-called honor killings often remain a private matter, accurate and reliable statistics on the practice or its frequency are difficult to ascertain. According to the United Nations, at least 5,000 women and girls, some as young as four, are killed every year, often by a member of their own extended family, usually a male. The teenage brothers or cousins of victims are frequently asked to commit the murder because minors are generally subject to considerably lighter legal consequences. The typical perpetrator convicted of an honor killing serves between three months to a year.

WOMEN AS PROPERTY

“A woman’s virginity is the property of the men around her... a commodity which must be guarded by a network of family and community members. If a woman strays, it is widely thought, the dignity of the men can be restored only by killing her,” says Nora Amrani, author of *Honor Killings And Women’s Rights*.

21-year-old Rania Arafat of Palestine was shot four times in the back of the head by her 17-year-old brother for refusing an arranged marriage to her cousin and eloping with her boyfriend, thereby bringing shame on the family.

Though Islamic religion and law provide no authority for such acts, a disproportionate number of the coun-

EL INDEPENDIENTE

VIEQUES BAJO ARRESTO

NECO OTERO. EDITOR DE “LA VOZ DE VIEQUES”

La lista de las atrocidades militares en Vieques es muy larga, pero en su comienzo y final se encuentra el dato que los viequeses constituyen una comunidad militarmente ocupada. En Vieques se ha visto la más infame destrucción de ecosistemas tropicales de gran belleza y rareza: miles de millas de arrecifes de corales han sido pulverizadas; hectáreas de manglares y lagunas convertidas en basureros tóxicos; bahías bioluminiscentes destrozadas; áreas de anidaje de aves en peligro de extinción; ensenadas donde se crían manatíes, y anidan las tortugas marinas, todas desoladas por los experimentos de la industria militar. La población humana está azotada por índices de mortandad por cáncer exageradamente altos. La deserción escolar, la drogadicción y el alcoholismo son consecuencias de la desesperanza y pobreza de una comunidad bajo ataques continuos.

Todos éstos, y muchos más, son los resultados de lo que ocurre cuando a los militares se les permite tener mano libre sobre los civiles. Los almirantes que han gobernado la Base Naval de Roosevelt Roads, de la cual la base de Vieques es parte, han ejercido tradicionalmente un poder omnímodo sobre nuestra sociedad civil, y han implantado una política prolongada dirigida a la eliminación de nuestra comunidad. Hubieran preferido eliminar toda la población, como hicieron en la isla Diego García, pero nuestra lucha los ha obligado a conformarse con un plan alerno: la sustitución de la población de viequeses nativos, que siempre ha resistido su presencia aquí, por una casta de hoteleros americanos, y sus ayudantes traídos de afuera, que le servirían a unos turistas de clase alta, en una relación simbiótica con los militares. Transformarían a Vieques en un Hawai caribeño, exclusivo. Y los chicos de Roosevelt Roads, y sus proveedores industriales, hubieran seguido en libertad de destruir la parte este de Vieques, mientras la llamada «zona de amortiguamiento», una enorme faja de la isla, ocupada por los militares, con su ambiente de paraíso tropical, y sus exuberantes playas, hubiera servido de campo de diversiones caribeñas para los ricos, y los exageradamente ricos, del «capital global» que se reparte el mundo. Esta es la política en contra de la cual estamos luchando hoy.

Sesenta y tres años de resistencia y lucha nos han enseñado dos o tres cosas sobre cómo confundir y desarticular a un enemigo mucho más grande y poderoso. Nos hemos organizado, y a pesar de que nuestros organizadores tienden a morir en accidentes misteriosos, otros siempre toman su lugar. Encarcelan a nuestros activistas, acusados de violaciones menores, y los envían a cárceles en Estados Unidos (los reclusos en las cárceles de Puerto Rico protegen a nuestros activistas). En una de esas cárceles remotas, en Tallahassee, apareció asesinado un día Ángel Rodríguez Cristóbal. Nunca olvidaremos a los encarcelados y los asesinados, pero muchos otros están listos para ocupar sus lugares.

Según hemos ido ganando terreno y apoyo, sus tácticas de terror han desbordado de sus cárceles a la comunidad en general. El teniente Alex de la Zerda, ayudante del almirante Arthur Knoizen, entonces jefe de la base

naval Roosevelt Roads, colocó un artefacto que explotó en el Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico, institución que proveía defensa legal gratuita a nuestros pescadores, que estaban enfrascados en lucha desigual en contra de la Flota del Atlántico de la Marina de Guerra de Estados Unidos. De la Zerda, y el jefe de los alguaciles federales en Puerto Rico, también trataron de colocar esos explosivos, que les proveía la Marina, en un avión entre cuyos pasajeros habrían de estar el líder de los pescadores, Carlos Zenón, y Víctor Emeric, hoy presidente de la Legislatura Municipal de Vieques.

¿Cuántos días de cárcel han cumplido estos asesinos en uniforme, estos terroristas federales y de la Marina? Ni uno. Ahí estaba la evidencia de sus propias investigaciones, pero todo el aparato federal de «justicia» en la colonia existe en función del apoyo a la conquista militar de Puerto Rico. Es la misma corte de Estados Unidos, no obstante, la que condena a los pescadores al máximo de seis meses de prisión por la ofensa menor de «trespassing» en aguas militares en protesta contra los bombardeos. Hoy, el líder de los pescadores, Carlos Zenón, y su hijo menor Yabureibo, cumplen una condena de seis meses de prisión en una institución de máxima seguridad, junto a docenas de otros activistas. En los últimos dos años, mucho más de mil puertorriqueños han sido arrestados por los militares («detenidos», dice el almirante Kevin Green, jefe actual de Roosevelt Roads), y sentenciados a prisión federal.

Los militares son los dueños de los jueces y magistrados, y los fiscales acusadores son oficiales militares de oficio que traen de diferentes bases en Estados Unidos. No hay juicios por jurados. Más bien, las convicciones y sentencias son expedidas sumariamente, de acuerdo a los pedidos de la fiscalía militar, por estas marionetas que posan como jueces y magistrados federales.

¿Por qué Vieques debe importarle a un ciudadano de Nueva York o de Illinois? Porque en la América post-11/9, los aliados de los militares proponen la eliminación del Posse Commitatus Act. Porque los ataques terroristas le han provisto a los John Ashcroft de la derecha con una ventana de oportunidad para hacer retroceder la historia de nuestros derechos civiles, que generalmente damos por sentado. En Vieques sabemos cuánto añoran el poder los militares. Los conocemos como la pandilla viciosa y asesina que son, y sabemos que sueñan con un régimen en el que puedan ejercer su dominio e imponer su orden opresivo sobre la ciudadanía. En Vieques han experimentado con mucho más que armas nucleares, químicas y bacteriológicas. Han explorado las diferentes vías y medios de ejercitar su corrupto poder sobre la sociedad civil.

Nuestra lucha por derrotar la tiranía militar en Vieques es un anticipo a la prolongada batalla que se desata dentro los círculos de poder de Estados Unidos, y que eventualmente se desatará públicamente. Si piensa que eso es imposible, piense otra vez. El terror del 11/9 le ha abierto las puertas de la jaula a las fuerzas siniestras que buscan la oportunidad de imponer controles y límites ostensibles sobre nuestras libertades, además de los controles subrepticios que ya existen. Saben muy bien cuán volátil es la economía del capital, y anticipan que sólo el control armado puede mantener las calles y las ciudades



ARRESTO de un protestante

en orden, y el mundo seguro para el dominio global del capital y la propiedad privada, en caso de una debacle financiera general.

No le permitamos a los militares invadir nuestra sociedad civil. Vamos a derrotarlos en la batalla de Vieques

SEGURO MÉDICO GRATUITO

Si usted reside en el estado de Nueva York, tiene entre 19 y 64 años, no puede aplicar para Medicaid, es ciudadano o inmigrante calificado, no tiene seguro médico y cumple ciertos requisitos económicos, infórmese sobre el programa Family Health Plus llamando al 1-877-934-7587.

El seguro médico Family Health Plus es gratuito e incluye servicios médicos, medicinas, pruebas de laboratorio y radiografías. Las posibilidades de conseguirlo son muchas puesto que aún no han habido muchas solicitudes.

Y si necesita seguro para sus hijos, llame al 1.800.698.4543 y le informarán sobre el programa Child Health Plus.

CURSOS EN INGLÉS

A continuación hay una lista de centros y números de teléfonos dónde se ofrecen clases de inglés gratuitas o a bajo costo.

Goodard Riverside Beacon program: 212.866.0009; YMCA: 212.741.8715, 212.741.4240, 718.961.6880, 718.353.4553; The Door: 212.941.9090 ext. 312; Dominican Women's Development Center: 212.740.1929; Literacy Assistance Center: 212.803.3300; Inwood Community Services: 212.942.0043; Community Life Center: 718.681.4137; Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation: 212.822.8300; Union Settlement Association: 212.828.6014; New York Public Library: 212.340.0918; Fortune Society: 212.206.7070; Church of Saint Francis Xavier: 212.627 2100; Riverside Language Program: 212.662.3200; Marymount Manhattan College: 212.517.0560; Bronx Educational Services: 718.991.7310; Riverside Language Program: 212.662.3200; University Settlement Society of NY: 212.674.9120; Columbia University: 212.854.1492; International Center: 212.255.9555; Asociación Tepeyac: 212.854.1492.

Si quieres colaborar en EL INDEPENDIENTE (escribir artículos, corregir pruebas, traducir, etc.), envía un email a: imc-nyc-espanol@lists.indymedia.org o asiste a una de nuestras reuniones en IMC (34 E 29th St, piso 2) los martes a las 7.

EL PRETENDIDO ESCARMIENTO A VENEZUELA

HUGO ALBERTO DE PEDRO, LA INSIGNIA

Quizás sea la primera de las derrotas que tendrán los EEUU en el Siglo XXI en la América Latina y el Caribe. Lo sucedido en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela entre los días 12 al 14 pasado no es algo menor en la vida contemporánea del sur postergado. En un solo país, durante meses se dieron todas las pruebas de lo que el Imperio es capaz de poner en juego sobre una democracia latinoamericana, a la cual no le pudo, por ahora, inventar con éxito sus conexiones con el terrorismo internacional para incluirla en su guerra del bien contra el mal, a pesar de insistir en las supuestas relaciones del chavismo con las FARC colombianas, mientras no duda en seguir llevándose el petróleo venezolano.

Cualquiera que en estos meses haya tenido la oportunidad de informarse sobre lo que acontecía en Venezuela y también fuera de sus fronteras, hoy no debería sentirse alarmado por los acontecimientos sucedidos. El "Escarmiento a Venezuela", como me permito llamarlo, es más de lo mismo de todos los planes que viene desarrollando la política exterior norteamericana en la región, como por ejemplo el Bloqueo Total a Cuba, las Dictaduras de los 70, el derrocamiento de Allende, la Contra Nicaragüense y el Plan Colombia. Pero en esta oportunidad se encontró con un pueblo firme en la decisión de mantener el cambio iniciado porque está viendo sus beneficios aún a pesar de la lentitud con los que llegan y militares de carrera provenientes de clases pobres o medias que no responden en su mayoría al poder de la oligarquía como sucede en la mayoría de nuestros países.

Una oleada inmensa de desinformación crecía día a día en torno del gobierno constitucional de Venezuela, mientras éste no hacía nada para frenar la embestida y seguía avanzando en sus políticas internas y externas de gobierno con el aval popular expresado en varias consultas y elecciones ciudadanas, que encrespaban cada vez más a todo el aparato partidario, tanto de la Acción Democrática y el Social Cristiano Copei, que supieron armar el pacto de Punto Fijo en 1958 junto a Unión Republicana Democrática. Los funcionales al sistema-modelo capitalista-neoliberal y siempre bien dispuestos a mantener los privilegios logrados en cincuenta años -empresariado nacional e internacional unido a la burocracia sindical- junto a sectores militares entrenados en las mejores escuelas de represión y dictatoriales, con el beneplácito de la iglesia colombiana; se convertían en una bomba pronta a detonar. Para lo cual sólo era necesario poner en funcionamiento la mediati-

zación del conflicto social e institucional tal cual fue realizado sin ningún tipo de escrúpulos por los medios de comunicación locales y foráneos.

Algunas de las políticas llevadas a cabo desde febrero de 1999, por el gobierno de Hugo Chávez Frías después del rotundo triunfo del Movimiento V República han sido:

- Relaciones diplomáticas con los países que los EEUU tienen en su lista de enemigos.
- Reactivación de la Organización de Países Exportadores de Petróleo (OPEP).
- Leyes como la de Hidrocarburos, Pesca, Tierras, Microfinanzas, Bancos, etc. han dado un contenido social y distribucionista nunca antes visto. Así como el proyecto de Reforma Agraria.
- Asumir la presidencia del Grupo de los 77.
- Activa participación en la Cumbre Sobre la Deuda Social y la Integración Latinoamericana.
- No se realizó ningún acuerdo con el FMI en los últimos tres años.
- Mejora las condiciones y acceso a la educación a más de 1.500.000 de nuevos estudiantes, un aumento del 30% en la matrícula escolar, con duplicación del presupuesto en educación y salud.



- La inversión en obras públicas fue triplicada.
- Mejora la construcción de viviendas populares en calidad y tamaño de las mismas.
- Aumento de la participación democrática popular. Creación de los Círculos Bolivarianos.
- Disminución del desempleo del 18 al 13 por ciento.
- Disminución de la pobreza según datos del Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo.
- Disminución de la mortalidad y desnutrición infantil. Duplicación del presupuesto de salud.

PERSPECTIVAS

- Disminución de la inflación y aumento de ingresos a los trabajadores.
- Crecimiento en la construcción, minería, venta de automóviles y en las inversiones extranjeras.
- Posicionamiento internacional en foros reclamando un cambio en las políticas hegemónicas mundiales de los países ricos.
- Oposición al ALCA y proponer la incorporación al MERCOSUR, como también la creación del ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana de las Américas)

Como podemos advertir, los pasos dados por la República Bolivariana de Venezuela son un pésimo ejemplo para el resto de la región visto a los ojos de quienes pretenden seguir agudizando el modelo de dependencia de los países del sur. Por eso no nos resulta llamativo el comportamiento del FMI en la voz del director Thomas Dawson quién en medio del Golpe de Estado manifestó la voluntad del organismo en ayudar inmediatamente a Venezuela y el de los gobiernos de España y EEUU. Debemos señalar también la rápida condena del Grupo de Río y de la OEA hacia el petrolero Pedro Carmona, convertido en presidente usurpador de poderes quién de un plumazo liquidó todas las estructuras democráticas del hermano país y realizó una caza de dirigentes como hacía muchos años no se producía en el continente.

Antes de pertenecer a la OPEP, Venezuela produjo 260 millones de dólares en petróleo. Debido a la explotación colonial, al país le quedaron sólo 8 millones, apenas un 3% del total.

Sin embargo, los acontecimientos deben ponernos sobre aviso de lo que puede suceder en nuestros países cuando se intentan cambiar los rumbos impuestos, fue un fuerte llamado de atención para: el seguramente triunfante Partido de los Trabajadores en el próximo octubre en Brasil, a las elecciones parlamentarias y presidenciales de éste año en Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Jamaica y Dominicana, y en Argentina que tiene tan preocupados al radicalismo y peronismo que hasta están pensando en juntar penas para presentarse juntos en las elecciones presidenciales para evitar su segura muerte cívica en el año venidero, o quizás antes si el desgobierno mantiene el camino emprendido.

¿Qué sucederá si nuevos vientos de liberación corren por Latinoamérica? ¿Estaremos dispuestos a enfrentar los cambios necesarios? ¿Podremos soñar en una verdadera y real unión de los pueblos del sur? ¿Conseguiremos dinamizar al Foro Social Mundial como antídoto a la globalización y en la búsqueda de un nuevo sistema económico-social del planeta?

Por lo pronto desde Venezuela ha bajado un ejemplo. Ojalá que se multiplique y podamos ir corrigiendo los errores cometidos en más de quinientos

RIESGOS ANTICIPADOS DEL ALCA-EDA

ALBERTO ACOSTA, DIARIO HOY, ECUADOR

Inaudito. Antes del atentado en Nueva York, existía información sobre la amenaza terrorista. Varios indicios concordantes anticipaban lo que se fraguaba. Incluso se conocía que el grupo integrista Al-Qaida iba a estrellar un avión con explosivos en el Pentágono. "Hay demasiado ruido sobre la línea, algo se prepara", se decía. Esas advertencias nunca fueron cotejadas, nada se hizo para prevenir la tragedia.

Esta falta de previsión es una lección. Las amenazas no pueden pasar desapercibidas por falta de difusión de la información disponible, tal como sucede con el ALCA (Acuerdo de Libre Comercio para las Américas). Aunque en este acuerdo una de las mayores preocupaciones es la apertura comercial, buena parte de los países latinoamericanos ya han introducido reformas para ello. El ALCA simplemente las profundizaría.

Si bien muchas de las propuestas se encuentran entre paréntesis, hay cómo anticipar la amenaza que se está fraguando. La sobreprotección a las inversiones extranjeras no trataría simplemente de desmontar las restricciones existentes. En la mira está constituir un marco jurídico que proteja al capital internacional frente a posibles medidas que adopte un Estado y que puedan ocasionar pérdidas en actividades futuras; en concreto, toda empresa internacional que se sienta afectada por alguna decisión de un gobierno podría demandarlo, en el marco de un arbitraje comercial, al margen de los poderes judiciales. Así de fácil. Y así de grave.

El ALCA, entonces, recoge las pretensiones del fracasado Acuerdo Multilateral de Inversiones (AMI). Y al incorporar y ampliar los acuerdos logrados en el marco del GATT, que dieron origen a la Organización Mundial de Comercio (OMC), el ALCA sería una suerte de OMC-plus, con consecuencias terroríficas que podrían sorprendernos si no se toma a tiempo nota de las advertencias.

Tal como lo propone el ALCA, ya actualmente bajo el capítulo 11 del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN), que protege en extremo a la inversión extranjera, son varias las empresas que han demandado por sumas multimillonarias a los países de Canadá, México y aun de los EE.UU. por potenciales perjuicios, inclusive por prohibir la importación de productos atentatorios contra la salud o el medio ambiente, como aconteció en el caso de la Ethyl Corp de EE.UU. en contra de Canadá.

¿Qué sucedería en un país de nuestra América Latina si una de las grandes empresas demanda a un gobierno débil y sin los recursos (ni la dignidad) para enfrentarla?

Será una torpeza no tomar en consideración esta amenaza y las otras que implica el ALCA-eda.

EL INDEPENDIENTE



INMIGRANTES EN NUEVA YORK

ENTREVISTA CON MÓNICA SANTANA

SILVIA ARANA

¿Cuándo surgió el Centro de Trabajadores Latinos?

Nuestra organización surgió en 1993, con el nombre de Lower East Side Workers Center, como un proyecto multiétnico que bregara con los derechos de los trabajadores latinos, asiáticos, afroamericanos. Al tratar de avanzar, nos encontramos con diferencias culturales, básicamente la barrera idiomática entre los diferentes grupos. Por otro lado, en esa época empezaron a llegar más y más inmigrantes latinos, quienes no tenían a dónde pedir ayuda (a diferencia de los otros grupos que disponían de varias asociaciones y sindicatos). En 1994 vimos la necesidad de transformar nuestra organización, y ahí surgió el Centro de Trabajadores Latinos.

¿Cuáles han sido las actividades principales del Centro a lo largo de estos años?

En una primera etapa, tuvimos dos tareas fundamentales: la escuela de inglés y la defensa de los derechos laborales de los inmigrantes. Invertimos mucho trabajo en los cursos de inglés. La escuela llegó a tener más de 200 alumnos; todos los profesores eran voluntarios. Los alumnos eran trabajadores de fábrica y pensamos que iba a ser simple desarrollar la conexión con la defensa de los derechos laborales, pero no fue así. Por ello, a partir del 95, nos fuimos enfocando cada vez más en la lucha contra las políticas anti-inmigrantes y por la defensa de los derechos laborales de los inmigrantes. Actualmente trabajamos con comités por condado, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Bronx, Queens y Staten Island. Promovemos la participación activa de nuestros miembros en todo tipo de organización comunitaria, asociaciones escolares, jardines, iglesias. A nivel de los comités se tratan todos los temas, desde Amnistía para los inmigrantes hasta derechos laborales.

Basándote en tu contacto con trabajadores latinos, tanto legales como indocumentados, que han sufrido abusos patronales, ¿cuáles crees que son las causas de este problema?

Es un conjunto de causas. Influyen las barreras del idioma, el racismo de los patrones, el desconocimiento de las leyes por parte de los trabajadores, las diferencias culturales. Pero quizás el factor más importante es el oportunismo patronal. Desde la decisión Hoffman se han incrementado considerablemente las denuncias de abusos patronales, contra trabajadores indocumentados y legales.

La decisión Hoffman se refiere al fallo de la Corte Suprema de Justicia del 27 de abril de este año. La Corte dictaminó que José Castro, un trabajador indocumentado que había sido despedido por sus actividades sindicales por la empresa Hoffman Plastic Compounds (California), no tenía derecho a protección laboral por su condición de "ilegal".

¿Cómo surgió la Coalición Nacional por la Dignidad y Amnistía para los Inmigrantes Indocumentados?

La idea se originó en octubre de 1995, cuando lanzamos la Campaña por la legalización de los inmigrantes indocumentados. Un año después, en Los Ángeles y en otras ciudades, varias organizaciones de defensa de los inmigrantes levantaron la misma demanda. En 1999, el Centro de Trabajadores Latinos convocó a la Coalición Nacional por la Dignidad y Amnistía para los Inmigrantes Indocumentados. Esta idea, que al principio, se la creía delirante, casi un tabú, poco a poco, se fue imponiendo. En el 2000 y 2001, la amnistía pasó a ser un tema de debate nacional. Varias organizaciones laborales incluida la Confederación de Trabajadores AFL-CIO, apoyaron la demanda de Amnistía. La Coalición está formada por 300 organizaciones en 25 estados del país.



Entonces y ahora, los inmigrantes han contribuido con su trabajo a construir esta nación.

¿Notaste algún cambio después del 11 de septiembre?

Durante el 2001 la lucha por el reclamo de la Amnistía para los indocumentados alcanzó su punto más alto. Las organizaciones enfocadas en el reclamo de legalización de los tres millones de mexicanos indocumentados que residen en este país adquirieron mucha fuerza. Araíz de ello se iniciaron negociaciones entre los gobiernos de Estados Unidos y de México con el fin de elaborar un plan para legalizar a los inmigrantes indocumentados. Esto era un paso gigante en el logro de nuestra meta tanto por la importancia numérica de los inmigrantes mexicanos, como por su valor como precedente para los demás grupos. Estas posibilidades quedaron postergadas después del 11 de septiembre.

Y no nos parece justo porque creemos que los inmigrantes no tienen ninguna responsabilidad en esos sucesos. Hemos pasado momentos difíciles pero ahora finalmente hemos logrado que el reclamo de Amnistía siga estando presente en el Congreso, en la Casa Blanca y principalmente como reivindicación fundamental de más de 300 organizaciones en todo el país.

Ahora estamos presentando una iniciativa legislativa en defensa de la unidad familiar. Tenemos que dejar de ser invisibles, tenemos que hacer visible esta gran masa que somos los inmigrantes. Tenemos un rol clave en la economía de este país, y pedimos lo que nos corresponde por nuestra contribución.

¿Hay congresistas que apoyen la Amnistía para los inmigrantes?

Sí, hay congresistas que apoyan la propuesta. Pero nuestras iniciativas se mueven principalmente con apoyo popular, con la movilización de nuestra gente. No queremos que la demanda de Amnistía se convierta en un eslogan de campaña. Es una cuestión de principios. Creemos que es lo justo.

¿Qué le dirías a los que se oponen a la amnistía para los inmigrantes latinos en Estados Unidos?

Este es un país de inmigrantes. Los inmigrantes contribuyeron con su trabajo a crear esta nación. Gente de todo el continente americano seguirá abandonando sus países como consecuencia de la grave crisis económica y política por la que atraviesan los países del área: República Dominicana, México, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, la lista es larga. Estas crisis son una consecuencia de la globalización de la economía impulsada desde los centros financieros de EE.UU.

El modelo neoliberal ha quebrado las economías locales, los servicios públicos, la educación, los sistemas de salud. Enfrentados a esta situación, los ciudadanos latinoamericanos, ven una salida: emigrar al país más poderoso del mundo. Es un espejismo, el sueño americano. La globalización es una contradicción porque se globaliza la economía para los dueños del capital pero a las personas se les pone todo tipo de obstáculos para moverse. Exigimos que las leyes de inmigración cambien, que reconozcan los derechos que los inmigrantes nos hemos ganado con nuestro trabajo.

*Centro de Trabajadores Latinos:
191E Calle 3 (entre Av. A y B)
tel.: 212.473.3936*

CONFLICTO EN LA FÁBRICA

ÁNGEL, MIEMBRO DEL COMITÉ TRABAJADORES EN ACCIÓN

Danmar Finishing es una fábrica textil, ubicada en Bushwick, Brooklyn, Nueva York. En ella trabajan 70 obreros en su mayoría inmigrantes hispanos de origen mexicano y ecuatoriano. Alrededor de 15 de ellos son miembros del Comité Trabajadores en Acción (rama laboral de la organización Se Hace Camino al Andar). Desde hace más de un año, los trabajadores de esta fábrica están reclamando el pago de horas extras. La presión de los trabajadores ha ido creciendo hasta conseguir el apoyo de políticos locales. Una de las empleadas y miembro del comité, María Arriaga, ha sido despedida del trabajo, pero esto no ha atemorizado a sus compañeros que siguen en pie de lucha. Han hecho gestiones ante el Departamento de Trabajo, para que éste cumpla con su deber y le exiga a la fábrica Danmar que haga efectivo el pago de las horas extras a los trabajadores.

Los medios de comunicación no han prestado ninguna atención a este conflicto. Lo único que han reportado son las declaraciones de la cantante colombiana Shakira, quien declaró que cuando modeló ropa para los catálogos de Delia's, no sabía que esta tienda vendía ropa manufacturada por Danmar Finishing y, que de haberlo sabido, no la hubiera promocionado.

Las gestiones de los obreros lograron su objetivo: el primero de mayo de este año, el Departamento de Trabajo de Estados Unidos entabló una demanda federal en favor de 175 trabajadores que reclaman el pago de horas extras desde 1998. En la demanda se le exige además a la firma que pague miles de dólares de multa por violaciones a las leyes laborales que regulan el pago de sobretiempo.